

Osher at RIT

New Course Leader Orientation

The Osher Mission

As stated by the bylaws, Osher's purpose is "to provide opportunities for intellectual and cultural interaction for people who are fifty years of age or older. Its primary focus shall be academically oriented courses and programs organized and led by the members." Our primary focus, therefore, is on the communication and discussion of ideas.

Osher Members and Course Leadership

We are a group with a wide range of views: socially, politically, educationally. Members come with a wealth of experience and information to share, along with a desire to explore new areas. A member survey conducted in 2012 documents that Osher members have a high level of satisfaction with their membership. 91% of members indicated that they were either "extremely satisfied" or "very satisfied" with Osher membership. Satisfaction is based on the opportunities that Osher at RIT provides for *intellectual interaction* through academically oriented courses.

As course leaders, we model the behavior we expect from participants: respect for all ideas. We support people who take a risk and speak out. Course leaders find that their fellow members have a great deal to contribute to each class session. In fact, members often find it more interesting to lead a class than to take one!

The Course Proposal

1. *Osher members have higher expectations and range of experience than the average high school or college student. Present material to meet these higher expectations.*
2. When planning your course, an important early decision is what type of class format is preferable, for example, lecture/discussion, peer group seminar, small group discussion or other. A complete overview of Osher class formats may be found on pages 6-7 of the ***Osher Course Leader Handbook*** (see **References** below.)

3. When preparing a proposal, thought should be given to the amount of course material planned and whether the topic is best suited to a half term or full term course. Course leaders have found that writing a brief outline of topics they hope to cover gives them some insight into planning for the appropriate number of sessions.
4. Fill out **all** the requested information on the course proposal form including the course description, catalog biography, equipment needed and desired classroom setup.

Special Notes on the course proposal form:

Section 4. Text or materials needed by class participants:

If a book is *required* for your course, include the ISBN of the edition you will be using.

Section 7A. Do you need training in use of classroom equipment?

Course leaders need to know how to use classroom equipment *prior* to the start of classes. When filling out question 7A, please indicate if you need training or assistance. We can provide the one-on-one, hands-on training that will make you comfortable with the equipment. Alternatively, we can pair you up with an A/V Wizard who has registered for your class. Wizards are Osher members who have undergone technical training on the classroom A/V equipment and who can provide a range of service to the course leader. Assistance can range from problem solving to handling all of your A/V requirements. Think of the A/V Wizard as a member of your team.

Section 8. Preferred Day/Time Slots for your course:

It is imperative that all course leaders indicate, in priority order, three day and time slot choices in which their course can be scheduled. As Osher has grown, we have an increasing number of course offerings and course scheduling has become a challenge. Scheduling and room assignments are based on several factors including the course leader's day/time preferences, the number of people who register for the course as well as the class format. In addition, scheduling considerations also include 1.) matching half term courses to allow full term use of one classroom and 2.) providing subject variety in any one time slot. Course leader flexibility is essential to the scheduling process.

Section 10. **Class Size Limits:**

Class size limits are discouraged without strong justification. When limits are allowed they are usually for seminar type courses where maximum class member participation is required. If you set a class size limit for your course, please tell us if you are willing to offer a second session.

Course proposal forms are available by download from the Osher website <http://osher.rit.edu/content/membersnews.html> or in hard copy in the reception area. Proposals submitted electronically are strongly preferred as this method greatly facilitates review of course information and inclusion in the catalog format.

Class Leadership During the First Class

1. Microphones should routinely be used in classrooms 1-4 since this is necessary for the functioning of assisted listening equipment by Osher members with hearing impairments. Use of microphones includes use by course leaders and use of roving microphones for class member comments and Q&A. See *Osher Council Policy Regarding Use of Assisted Listening Equipment in Osher Classrooms 1-4*, **Osher Course Leader Handbook**, pp 18 & 19.

Note: *There is a short instructional video on the proper use of classroom microphones on the desktop of all of our classroom computers. The video can be started from an icon located on the desktop. The icon is titled "Geoff & Carol Present" and lasts approximately 4 minutes.*

1. At the beginning of the first class session, ask **all new Osher members** to identify themselves by raising their hands. Please welcome these new members to Osher at RIT.
2. At the beginning of each class, read the weekly *Participation Announcements*. This is an important way for members to be aware of Osher news and upcoming events. Reading the *Announcements* usually only takes a minute of class time. Even if your course is not held until Thursday or Friday, you cannot assume that everyone in your class has heard the *Announcements*.

Note: Course leaders who are using classroom computers for their courses may display the weekly Participation Announcements so that class members may follow along as they are being read. The Announcements may be found on the **News and Information for Osher Members** page of our website at

<http://osher.rit.edu/content/membersnews.html>

3. Attendance – It is important for staff to have accurate course registration information for safety reasons, to help manage “waiting lists” and to facilitate class cancellation notification.

“Take attendance” the first day of class by asking each member to check their name on your class roster. Announce to the class that if anyone's name is not on the class roster that they need to complete the *Add/Drop Form* and submit it to staff to be registered. Also announce that members who wish to drop a course also must complete the *Add/Drop Form*.

Special Note on “Taking Attendance”

If your class is not large, an option for taking attendance would be for you to read off the list of people registered for your class and check off the names as they are read. This does two things: 1. It helps you put a name to a face and 2. It gives everyone a bit of recognition which most people like.

4. Introductions during the first class help to make everyone feel a part of things. If the class is not too big, this is an important way to begin. It is helpful for the course leader to be the first to introduce him or herself and to talk about what led to the offering of the course.

5. Clarify plans and expectations for the course with energy and enthusiasm. Include some aspect of the content of the course. Hand out a syllabus. Be wary of starting with lengthy background material that absorbs much of first meeting but doesn't illustrate what a typical class will be like.

6. Ask participants to make sure their name tags are visible. Try to address each person by name as they contribute to the discussion or ask a question. This recognition helps members feel welcomed and helps all members get to know each other.

7. Allow time for questions and discussion.

Leading an Effective Discussion

1. Each class session needs a goal if it is to be clearly organized. At the beginning of the class period, discuss the plan for the class and indicate when discussion/questions will be appropriate.
2. Use open ended questions (those with many possible responses, not just one one right answer).
3. Repeat class member question before responding.
4. Recognize everyone who wishes to speak, rather than letting a few dominate. It is important to retain control of the discussion. Here are two ideas to try:
 - Make a list of names as hands are raised and call on people in order
 - If a few are dominating the discussion, say "Now we would like to hear from those who haven't spoken yet."
5. During the discussion, it may be appropriate for the instructor to state his/her biases and point of view, since these may be obvious, while still being careful to encourage alternative viewpoints.
6. Encourage those who want an active role. They may wish to research a topic and report back. Many may have relevant information to share.
7. The course leader's role is to engage the class so that they are involved, but not to overwhelm them with information.
8. Keep the discussion focussed; be alert to shifting the topic when one is exhausted or is not working well. Course leaders may say "Let's move on to the next topic."
9. Occasionally ask the class *How are we doing? Do you have any suggestions as to how we can operate differently?*
10. Insist that all views be respected. Disagreement is good but rudeness should not be tolerated.

11. If the discussion gets scattered or unproductive, ask the class to help sum up the main points are so far.

The Class is Working Well If:

1. The class and leader are enthusiastic.
2. The AV equipment is handled smoothly. It may be helpful to assign a class member to operate the AV equipment so that the class lecture and discussion are not interrupted.
3. Volunteers handle the roving microphones.
4. The course leader keeps questions, discussions, and course material focused and in balance.
5. Small adjustments in the curriculum are made throughout the course according to the students needs, understanding and interest.
6. The course leader trusts the silence. The class needs to see that the leader can stop talking and make room for ideas. They may need time to formulate them.
7. The leader and members are engaged in joint exploration, with class members contributing to the course leader's understanding as well as the other way around. Unlike some other classroom situations, information at Osher *flows from course leader to student, student to course leader* and student to *student*.

Classroom Tips & Other Suggestions for Course Leaders:

1. Attend the **Course Leader Meeting/Brunch** which is held the week prior to the start of each term. This meeting is an opportunity to introduce yourself and your course, to meet your fellow course leaders and to get caught up on the latest news and information.

2. Consider a co-leader to work with you. An extra leader can split the work load as well as help with the computer and audio-visual equipment.

3. Consider creating a Google website for the course. Course websites are a great way to distribute course material and provide supplemental content and references. You can upload PowerPoint or Keynote slides, topics for the next class, links to useful content and videos as well as class announcements. See pages 23 – 30 of the **Osher Course Leader Handbook** for information on Google website creation.

Note: *Uploaded files to Google websites are limited to a maximum of 10 MB. Larger files may be shared with your class through various "Cloud" file sharing services such as Dropbox.*

4. You may also share class information via email. At the start of the term, you will receive a class roster containing email addresses of the students who have registered for your course. Send out a welcoming note and include a class syllabus and topics for the first class. Later, you can send out a bibliography and other material for further reading.

5. Meet your A/V Wizard and agree on how the two of you will work together. Make clear how you want the Wizard to assist you.

6. With your Wizard, try out the A/V equipment in your assigned classroom the week before class starts to find out if there are any glitches.

7. With your Wizard, get to the classroom early before each class to set up the computer, projector and sound levels. Have a checklist of what needs to be done.

8. Vacate the classroom on time since schedules are very tight. Course leaders in the 11:15-12:45 time slot and in any afternoon time slot need to be aware that *meetings may be scheduled immediately following their class.*

9. If a field trip is planned, remember that Osher requires a release form be signed by each class member. Get the forms from staff.

10. A mail box for course leaders is located in the copy room behind the reception desk. Check your mailbox at least weekly for information including new class lists, personal messages, notices and weekly *Participation Announcements*.

11. Course leader feedback. Remind class members to complete the *Course Leader Feedback Form* **at any time during the course**. The purpose of this form is to provide you with positive, constructive criticism and suggestions.

References:

Osher Website, *News & Information for Osher Members*:

<http://osher.rit.edu/content/membersnews.html>

Osher Course Leader Handbook

<http://osher.rit.edu/files/courseleaderhandbook.pdf>

New Course Leader Orientation Slide Presentation

<http://tinyurl.com/c9slydd>

Course Leader Advisors

The following course leaders have volunteered to serve as advisors/coaches for Osher members who are considering leading or co-leading a course at some time in the future. All are veteran course leaders with practical experience they are willing to share on a one-to-one basis. Feel free to talk with any of us if you would like to learn more about leading a course.

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COC / October 30, 2013

Questions regarding the content of this document should be directed to Peter Luce,
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