Charging through Victory Tunnel in Tiger Stadium, the group has one goal in mind: have fun and enjoy the experience. Hands reach to touch the “WIN” bar over the tunnel’s entrance, but they don’t belong to the LSU football team. The hands are those of seasoned learners entering Death Valley as part of an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at LSU, or OLLI at LSU, course.

“Behind the Scenes of LSU Athletics” offered OLLI members an inside look at college athletics. Members participated in guided tours of LSU athletic facilities, including Tiger Stadium and the new Alex Box Stadium. Led by coaches and administrators, OLLI members learned about the day-to-day challenges of running a college athletic program.

The sports course is one of more than 100 courses offered each year to members of OLLI at LSU members, a community of adults age 50 and older that fosters lifelong learning through courses designed to challenge, inform, and enrich. OLLI boasts more than 900 members in three chapters: Lagniappe Studies Unlimited Chapter and the Felicianas Chapter in St. Francisville. Members pay an annual membership fee and a modest registration fee for each course, which are offered in the fall, spring, and summer.

Tom Moore, chair of the OLLI at LSU advisory council, has been involved with the program for thirteen years. Moore has been an instructor and a course coordinator for several courses and helped organize the “Behind the Scenes of LSU Athletics” course. “The whole concept of OLLI at LSU is to create new senior learning experiences,” Moore says. “Whether your interests are in history, opera, art, or science, OLLI at LSU has something for everyone. My wife, Margaret, and I share different interests, and we’ll often take a variety of courses and then discuss what we’ve learned with one another.”

A unique feature of the program is the direct involvement of the members in the course development process. “OLLI courses are suggested and planned by members, not by LSU staff,” says Doreen Massey, director of the program. “Member-led committees and leadership help direct the evolution of the program. OLLI members delight in the challenge of creating new, interesting courses each term.”

Robert Evans, a member since 1996 and a past president, refers to OLLI at LSU as the “best kept secret in Baton Rouge.”

“I graduated from LSU in 1958 with a degree in chemical and petroleum engineering,” Evans says. “I didn’t have many electives while I was in school. So, later in my life, OLLI at LSU gives me the opportunity to take courses on subjects I’ve always been attracted to.”

Both retired and active LSU faculty, as well as community experts, teach OLLI courses. There are no tests or grades. Instructor Miriam Overton is an expert in religious studies and medieval philosophy. During the spring semester, Overton taught “God in a Box,” examining a methodology for working with ancient sacred texts.

“All the courses I’ve taken have been great.,” Evans says. “The thing that has stuck with me is that you gain a wealth of knowledge that you can pass on to others.”

“Whether you’re interested in history, opera, art, or science, OLLI at LSU has something for everyone.”

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Josette Lester and her husband, newcomers to the St. Francisville area, found their membership in the Felicianas Chapter an easy way to meet new people. “Participating in OLLI at LSU has improved my life in so many ways, and I have met some of the most wonderful people you would ever hope to know,” says Lester. “It has given me something meaningful and fulfilling after retiring, and its courses have stretched my mind and allowed me a glimpse into a world that I never thought I would explore.”

OLLI at LSU traces its roots back to a 1994 article written by the late Baton Rouge physician Dr. Charles Prosser, recommending that people should continue learning for as long as they are able. The article inspired Ann McCrorey, an LSU Continuing Education staff member, to develop an enrichment program for seasoned learners age 50 and older. She approached then-Dean Dean Fritz McCammon about organizing night courses for older adults off campus, and the LSU “Live and Learn” program was created, initially attracting about seventy-five members. Membership grew steadily after the program changed its name to Lagniappe Studies Unlimited – to correspond with LSU initials – and began offering daytime courses at convenient off-campus locations.

In 2007 Continuing Education applied for and won its first grant from the Bernard Osher Foundation to develop an off-campus chapter in Baton Rouge. The Bernard Osher Foundation, and the program became an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, one of 120 institutes located on university and college campuses throughout the United States.

The Bernard Osher Foundation has awarded OLLI at LSU three $100,000 grants, and in April made a $1 million endowment gift to the program for demonstrating success and sustainability. The endowment will provide support for the OLLI program and keep membership and registration fees low.

YOU AND OLLI OLLI at LSU holds regular “Coffee & Lagniappe” events that are open to the public. Individuals age 50 and over who like to learn are invited to socialize, enjoy refreshments, and learn from guest speakers. For details about upcoming programs and membership information, visit www.outreach.lsu.edu/OLLI or call 225-578-6763.

Andrew White is a communications assistant in LSU Continuing Education.
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“What I enjoy most about teaching at OLLI at LSU and this age group is their enthusiasm for learning, their intellectual curiosity, and their engagement with the subject matter,” Overton explains. “The members bring such a wealth of knowledge to the classroom that it creates a deeper learning experience for everyone.”

OLLI at LSU also offers local field trips. Members have recently traveled to the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory, Honey Island Swamp, the Islamic Center of Baton Rouge, and Poverty Point State Historic Site. In the spring, OLLI members traveled to Mary Ann Brown Nature Preserve as part of a new monthly “Nature Walks in the Felicianas.”

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