



Study Group Facilitator Handbook

Thank you for volunteering your time and knowledge as a facilitator for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Bradley University! This go-to guide is a valuable resource you can use to make your experience as a facilitator a rewarding one for both you and the study group participants

If you have any question or need help in any way, please reach out to us:

OLLI study group co-chairs Roberta Koscielski (309) 264-1966 and Rob Parks (309) 231-1724

OLLI Director Catherine Lawless/OLLI Administrative support Bonni Whalen (309) 677-3900

What to Expect

Once you have agreed to facilitate a study group, you will complete a worksheet (see index) with description, dates, time, and confirmed location. Once submitted, your group is usually considered scheduled and you can expect “radio silence” for a few months prior to the start of your group. OLLI quarterly registration is usually held one month in advance of the season (if you are facilitating a spring group starting in March, April, May then registration would open in February.)

The worksheet is the document staff uses to schedule your group sessions and technology needs. The worksheet includes the logistics of your group, including a title, reading material, days/dates/times, guest speakers, and technology needed.

As we get closer to your start date please be sure to watch your email for the following:

- 1) An update on the number of class participants from an OLLI staffer (this will come from a Bradley email, most likely bwhalen@bradley.edu or clawless@bradley.edu).
- 2) An email or call from your study group host, one of the participants who has volunteered to coordinate snacks, introductions, and any help with other tasks.
- 3) Approximately one week before the group start date the OLLI staff will email the group reminding participants about the location, dates and time.
- 4) We usually suggest facilitators email the participant about one or even two weeks prior. This can be done before or after the staff email. This email serves to introduce yourself, welcome the group and let them know of any homework or prior expectation you may have before the start (the first two chapters should be read, or review this article, etc...)

If you wish to email your entire group, please use the “bcc” (blind carbon copy) address block and place your address in the “to” block.

Our members' personal information (addresses, phone numbers, emails) is not shared, sold, or used for non-OLLI related activities. In addition, study groups may not support or oppose political parties, candidates, or political issues; they may not be used to sell or promote products or services; they may not be used to generate client lists, nor may they be used to promote sectarian points of view.

Preparing for Your Study Group

Expect an informal, friendly atmosphere. Our members dress casually and interact easily among themselves. Many OLLI members are highly engaged learners who are either retired or soon to be retired from accomplished careers. They bring their own expertise and life experiences to the group, which makes for lively exchanges. We are confident you will find it a pleasure to work with them.

- ✓ Identifying your group's goals and objectives is of utmost importance – your starting place is to identify what you want to achieve. For instance, what do you realistically hope for your group to attain? If you are leading a group on modern American history, where will you begin and end? What can you realistically cover in the allotted time?
- ✓ Your next step is to identify the materials you'll need to accomplish those goals. Consider handouts, movie clips, exhibits, magazine clippings, posters, and group projects. Also consider if you want to make reading assignments, request individual research and presentations, and/or host guest speakers.
- ✓ Please keep copyright information in mind when planning to show clips from a movie or other materials. Contact OLLI staff for further guidance regarding copyrights.
- ✓ After you have defined your learning objectives, **you may find it helpful to write an outline to share with your class.** Facilitators are not required to prepare a syllabus, but staff does recommend an overall outline, as it can help members anticipate the flow of the group. In addition, easy-to-read handouts are helpful and always appreciated by the members.
- ✓ Many study group participants enjoy the opportunity to do additional learning outside of group meetings. If you have the resources (such as reading suggestions or websites to visit), we encourage you to offer them to your group. Please also provide a copy of this material to staff for our records.

In most cases, OLLI study groups are held in locations with free, plentiful parking.

For each session you will meet your host, who will provide your name tent, any handouts you requested, and assistance with technology. **Please plan to arrive at least 20 minutes prior to the start of your group.**

On the last day of your group, the host will announce that evaluations will be emailed to all participants (and you). All evaluations are reviewed by staff and volunteers at the next Study Group Committee meeting, usually held a few weeks after the season has ended. Staff will email you a summary of your evaluations at that time as well.

Technology Considerations

As noted on your study group proposal worksheet, the technology available to facilitators includes laptops, projectors and screens, internet access, clickers, podiums, and microphones. OLLI does not have technicians on site for assistance, however, so it is incumbent upon each facilitator to have a working understanding of the technology chosen for the group.

- ✓ **OLLI provides** free jump drives so you can save presentations, copy materials for your students, and have a backup in case of a technology failure at your location. **As a reminder, be sure to always bring adapters and power cords with your laptop (especially if you use a Mac).** It is also recommended that you set your laptop resolution to 1024 x 768 for maximum visibility on projectors.
- ✓ As we know, internet may be slow or occasionally unavailable, leading to frustrating instructional delays. **Facilitators, especially those using video and music files, are advised to download web-based materials to that flash drive before group meetings to avoid potential problems or delays.**
- ✓ The Continuing Education office is happy to make photocopies for your group. In an effort to save paper, we do ask each facilitator to **carefully consider the format and number of handouts** necessary. We recommend electronic versions of all handouts vs. paper.
- ✓ For PowerPoint slides, we recommend three slides per page and double-sided printing (anything above three slides is difficult to read).
- ✓ It is preferable to receive your handout in electronic form so that we may save it to our files. However, you may also drop off hard copies at our office.
- ✓ Email is the most common method of communication between our facilitators and members. Please note: members' contact information is private and may not be used or shared without permission.

For presentations, we recommend use of PowerPoint. **Here are some quick tips for effective PowerPoint presentations:**

- Select a single sans-serif font such as Arial or Helvetica with at least 24-point size
- Use a maximum of 6-8 words per line.
- Use dark text on light background.
- Consider converting it to a PDF for consistency across PowerPoint versions.

- Avoid reading the slides.
- Use a remote clicker to advance the slides so you can move around as you speak.
- Face your audience as often as possible.

Facilitator Best Practices

We have developed a list of best practices to consider as you prepare for your group.

Best Practices for working with OLLI members:

- Facilitators should email group expectations in their introductory letter.
- During the first session, allow time for everyone to introduce themselves, but set a time limit for this so it does not take your entire session.
- Speak loudly enough so everyone can hear and use a microphone if it's available
- Make the environment comfortable and leave time for breaks (every 45-60 minutes)
- Facilitate discussion and let the group direct themselves in the learning process
- Have a list of questions ready to prompt discussions
- Use open-ended questions to bring out the vast experiences of your students
- Have a housekeeping/recap time to answer questions from previous meetings
- Keep the discussion focused and summarize key points (or ask others to)
- Assume most OLLI participants are intellectually curious and excited to learn more
- At the end of the first session it's a good idea to ask "is this what you expected in the study group" to air any misunderstandings right away.

Best Practices to keep your group focused during a discussion:

- At the outset of the group, ask everyone to agree on desired outcomes and group expectations
- Focus on the learning – remind members of things they've learned or realized
- Don't let members shoot others' (or their own) ideas down
- "During last week's group, we agreed ..."
- "For the next five minutes we are going to brainstorm possible research topics ..."

Best Practices to help your group when it seems confused, stuck, or is in an argument:

- Take a step back and ask (but don't answer) these strategic questions
 - Who are we? What did we plan to study? How did we agree to get there?
- Restate question addressed to facilitator and address it to the group
- Avoid answering questions
- Make observations about what is going on in the group
- If something is not working, get it out in the open and ask group to address
- "Everyone is very quiet. What does this mean?"
- "You seem confused. What is causing the confusion?"
- Remind and enforce agreements made by the group

- Refocus and make sure group is talking together about the same idea
- “Let’s get back on track. We were discussing”
- “That’s a great question, let’s hang on to it a bit”
- Respond and validate all ideas by responding to each one
 - Acknowledge contribution
 - Choose to deal with it now or defer until later
 - Agree with member about how to move forward
 - Move on
- If there is a habitual or disruptive situation, contact the OLLI Director for assistance

OLLI Study Groups and Facilitators

OLLI study groups are part of our non-credit (no required tests or grades) lifelong learning community, which is focused on providing opportunities for socialization and sense of belonging; a wide variety of high-quality experiences; an inviting and friendly atmosphere; and an outlet to keep growing intellectually.

Study groups are in-depth learning experiences that encourage interactive participation by members. They are led by facilitators, who establish group expectations and areas of study. As active, involved learners, members often complete outside reading and sometimes make in-class presentations. Study groups meet for 1.5 to 2.5-hour sessions one day a week, anywhere from 4 – 8 weeks.

Study groups are characterized by the anticipated level of member participation. It is important to be specific in the worksheet description about how members will participate and expectations regarding timing of assignments.

- **Discussion-based:** participants may be asked to read material and participate in whole group discussions
- **Participation-based:** participations may be asked to read material, participate in small group breakouts/discussions, do research, and/or make brief oral reports
- **Practice-based:** participants may be asked to learn a skill set and engage in practice between sessions

Study group facilitators are volunteers who want to pursue a topic of interest. That topic does not require vocational expertise; instead, many topics are chosen purely based upon avocational passion. The selection of a topic that you feel passionate about or interested in is vital to the success of your study group.

Study groups are held throughout the Peoria community. If you need assistance identifying and securing a location contact the OLLI staff (309) 677-3900. Groups usually have a minimum of 7 and maximum of 20 participants; the limits are set by facilitators and based on room capacity.

The Study Group Committee Process

OLLI study groups meet in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. The Winter term is held in January and February. Spring is held in March, April, and May (excluding Wednesdays in April to avoid conflict with OLLI classes). Summer is held in June, July, and August. Fall is held in September, October, November, and sometimes into the first week or two of December (excluding Wednesdays in October to avoid conflict with OLLI classes).

The Study Group Committee meets approximately 4-5 months before the start of each term, during which volunteers brainstorm ideas and recruit facilitators. Potential facilitators are asked to complete a worksheet ([via Word, Adobe pdf, or online link](#)), which is the document staff uses to schedule your group and prepare . The worksheet includes the logistics of your group, including a title, reading material, days/dates/times, guest speakers, and technology needed.

It's important to have a catchy yet accurate title for your study group. When describing your group, please remember the key is to explain why someone should take it, rather than listing what you'll do during the meetings. At the end of the planning session, a volunteer will notify you that your proposal and/or worksheet has been accepted and your group is on the schedule for the upcoming season.

After that notification, there will be “radio silence” from the staff for approximately six weeks as staff works to complete the season’s brochure, but the committee co-chairs will be available to help answer any questions while you continue to prepare for your group

You will receive a group roster with names, telephone numbers, and email addresses approximately two weeks before the start of your group. If you need the information sooner, please contact the Continuing Education office, but note that registrations are often received up to a week before the start of groups.

Once these logistic hurdles are tackled, you will have time to really “dig in” and prepare for the study group sessions.

As a small token of appreciation, OLLI offers study group facilitators who facilitate all of the sessions the choice of a free class, study group, or \$25 gift card from Barnes & Noble.

Your Role in Our Learning Community

Since its inception in 1994, our lifelong learning program has relied on the volunteer efforts of our facilitators. Although facilitators do not receive monetary compensation, many facilitators have found working with our members to be a rich and rewarding experience – enough so to ask to lead another group. Facilitators do receive a free OLLI program (class or study group worth up to \$45) for their time. If they do not wish to take an upcoming OLLI program they may choose to receive a \$25 gift certificate as a token of appreciation. Those who facilitate one week of a group, do not receive the free upcoming program but they are considered “enrolled” in the program they are helping facilitate for no cost.

OLLI subscribes to an environment of thoughtful discussion and mutual respect which is at the heart of a university-based experience. We value our participants and those who volunteer to share their time and talent with us. These ideals enable us to enjoy the constructive exchange of ideas and remain informed and excited as lifelong learners. We embrace these ideals as a commitment to civility and academic freedom.

Continuing Education Office and Staff

The [Division of Continuing Education and Professional Development at Bradley University](#) connects the University with the community through educational programs and services for youth, professionals, and lifelong learners. **Our staff is proud to provide outstanding customer service.**

The following staff members are your primary contacts for OLLI study group programming. Please contact us with any questions or requests.



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About OLLI at Bradley

[The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Bradley University \(OLLI\)](#) is an organization with programs designed by and for those reaching retirement and beyond, whose members share a common goal: to remain connected and active in their late-career and post career lives.

For close to 30 years, Bradley University has sponsored educational programs for lifelong learners. The Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR), Bradley's first program, began in 1994 with 84 participants and 10 classes. We now have more than 1,000 individuals participated in hundreds of programs, including classes, study groups, educational travel, and special events.

In 2008, The Bernard Osher Foundation awarded Bradley University's Continuing Education Division a grant to further support the ILR. This distinction resulted in a new name, The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Bradley University. In both 2010 and 2014, The Osher Foundation awarded Bradley with a \$1 million endowment gift.

Today, **OLLI at Bradley is recognized by The Osher Foundation as a national program of distinction** that provides its members a diverse collection of year-round programs, including classes, educational travel, study groups, and co-sponsored programs. To learn more about OLLI, please visit our website, bradley.edu/olli.

About The Bernard Osher Foundation

[The Bernard Osher Foundation](#), headquartered in San Francisco, was founded in 1977 by Bernard Osher, a patron of education and the arts known as “the quiet philanthropist.” Osher is a respected businessman and community leader whose namesake Foundation seeks to improve the quality of life through support for higher education and the arts.

There are 125 [Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes](#) (OLLIs) spanning all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each is an independently operated lifelong learning initiative of its host college or university and is supported in part by The Bernard Osher Foundation.