

## **OLLI Guidelines for Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**

Special interest Groups (SIGs) are a benefit offered to all OLLI members. They foster fellowship by allowing OLLI members to engage with others who share a common interest. SIGs complement and enhance College for Seniors courses and other programs offered by OLLI; they are not to compete with or duplicate them. Membership in SIGs is open to all OLLI members, based on the capacity of the group and any basic skill levels that might be required to participate. Commercial or professional solicitation for services or products is not permitted at SIG meetings.

SIGs, even more than most OLLI programs, are member-driven and not staff-driven. They are established, managed, and run by OLLI members who share an interest. OLLI provides meeting space when possible and opportunities for SIGs to publicize and promote their activities. The OLLI Hospitality Committee works with staff and oversees SIGs as volunteer advisors and organizers. A SIG's vitality, therefore, depends mainly upon the active participation and commitment of its own members. It also requires that SIG members, to the degree possible, learn how to resolve differences of opinion swiftly and internally for the good of the group and the continuing existence of the SIG.

These guidelines explain how SIGs are established and operate within OLLI, and they provide tips for maintaining a thriving SIG.

### **ESTABLISHING A NEW SIG**

#### **Application Process**

1. Begin by reading the guidelines completely so that you understand the purpose, structure, and operation of the SIGs and the entire process for establishing one.
2. Obtain and complete a proposal form. These are available on the OLLI website at [olliasheville.com](http://olliasheville.com) under "OLLI Groups and Volunteers."
3. Complete and submit your proposal to the OLLI office by email ([OLLI@unca.edu](mailto:OLLI@unca.edu)) or in person, directing the form to the attention of OLLI Member Relations Coordinator, Pascale Couturier-Armstrong.
4. SIG proposals will be reviewed by members of the Hospitality Committee (chaired by Patricia Massey), Catherine Frank (OLLI Executive Director), Pascale Couturier-Armstrong (Member Relations Coordinator), Herb Gunn (College for Seniors Program Manager), and Hannah Furguele (Programs Manager). They will be returned to the applicant for additional information, with suggestions for revision or with approval and next steps. The Hospitality Committee chair(s) will talk to applicants to help move the application forward to a successful organizational meeting.

#### **Organizational Meeting**

At the organizational meeting the group should accomplish the following:

1. **Agree upon a SIG Coordinator and other "officers" who will assist in the organization and management of the group.** Each SIG is required to have a coordinator who is responsible for the group's activities and compliance with OLLI's guidelines for SIGs, including maintaining and submitting SIG rosters. Although there is a coordinator, SIGs are strongly encouraged to distribute tasks among several members, planning when and how they will share responsibilities and designating back-up coordinators for key tasks. We also encourage SIGs to consider a plan for changes in leadership. Any group benefits from new perspectives and new energy. More than one

SIG has had robust attendance but has ended because no one was willing to step up to organize meetings and events.

2. **Decide whether there are any minimum requirements for participation in the group.** For example, a SIG for bridge players should specify whether it is for beginning, intermediate, or advanced players. Some groups require active and appropriate participation in conversations or that every member of the group takes turns hosting meetings. All rules for participation must be clear and applied consistently. The consequences for not following the rules should be made clear to anyone who expresses interest in joining a SIG.
3. **Confirm that there is sufficient interest and activity among members and prospective members to maintain a viable SIG.** A viable SIG should have about 12 members who are willing to attend meetings regularly.
4. **Agree on a meeting schedule and format arranged with the help of Leanna Preston.** SIGs formed after June 2013 may only meet once a month. Please remember that the Reuter Center is a busy place. We cannot accommodate all requests, and occasionally we have to cancel SIG meetings to meet other priorities.
5. **Review the guidelines set by OLLI for SIGs and for the use of the Reuter Center, and review these guidelines with all members of a group.** If you have any questions or concerns about guidelines, please contact Catherine Frank.

### Approval

- Upon completion of the organizational meeting, the SIG organizers should meet with the Hospitality Committee chair(s) to review any questions or concerns.
- The Hospitality Committee chairs will notify Leanna Preston, Pascale Couturier-Armstrong, and all other relevant staff and members that the SIG is operational.
- Information about the SIG will be posted on the website, and the office will be happy to put a call for members in the weekly email newsletter.
- Please be aware that if a group posts a request for new members, terms of membership must be clearly stated. The group must have clearly stated criteria for choosing among members if demand is greater than the SIG's capacity.

## OPERATION OF SIGS

### Meetings and Scheduling

- Most SIGs meet on a regular schedule. Although some SIGs meet more frequently, we can only schedule monthly meetings for groups at the Reuter Center, including sub groups of existing SIGs, created after June 2013 (the date we enacted this policy).
- Most SIGs meet at the Reuter Center, but others meet regularly or occasionally at other locations, according to the SIG's needs and preferences. Groups that focus on alcohol (wine or beer tasting groups) must meet off campus. We currently have SIGs that meet at restaurants and members' homes. Groups that meet at locations other than the Reuter Center must still follow these guidelines.
- Do not contact other university departments about meeting spaces. Space is at a premium on campus, and the terms of scheduling are different from those at the Reuter Center.
- It is the responsibility of the SIG coordinator to notify all members of the group of meeting time, space, and any changes in schedule. Please make sure that Pascale Couturier-Armstrong is aware of schedule changes as well.
- SIG coordinators must contact Leanna Preston (828-232-5181 or lpreston@unca.edu) to request meeting space. SIGs that meet at the Reuter Center are required to select a

regular meeting schedule and to make space reservations in advance during the following time periods:

- Monday-Thursday, between 2 and 6:30 pm.
  - Friday, between 1 and 6:15 pm.
- SIG meeting times are reviewed each term and may be changed to accommodate CFS class schedules and other OLLI activities.
  - Meeting times are scheduled no more than six months in advance. Although we will make every effort to schedule SIGs on a consistent day at a specific time, OLLI courses and workshops, OLLI membership events, approved UNC Asheville events, and OLLI building rentals (activities that generate revenue or that benefit the UNC Asheville or OLLI community as a whole) have priority in the allocation of space. SIGs may be bumped from their standard meeting time and location to accommodate such events and activities. Leanna Preston will notify SIG coordinators as soon as possible if we have to cancel a SIG meeting for lack of space. Please check the posted daily schedule in the Reuter Center to confirm the location of your meeting.
  - OLLI's adverse weather closings apply to SIGs. If OLLI is closed for reasons of weather, SIG meetings will be canceled.

### **SIG Etiquette**

- Observe scheduled beginning and ending times for your SIG. The Reuter Center is a busy place, and staff has worked hard to balance many competing demands.
- Use only the rooms that you have scheduled. An empty room does not mean a "free room."
- Be considerate of others when sharing space or meeting in close proximity to other groups. Be careful that your noise level and activities do not interfere with others' enjoyment of the Reuter Center.
- The staff will make every effort to ensure that you have all of the furnishings and equipment you need to run your group. If you do not find what you need available when you arrive, please contact Leanna Preston or Pascale Couturier-Armstrong.
- Some SIGs have varied attendance. Every room in the building holds chairs that accommodate the permissible number of people for the room. Please do not move chairs from one room to another. If you have more people than chairs, it is the responsibility of the SIG leader to turn people away to maintain safety.
- At the end of each SIG meeting, return all furniture to standard set-up and make sure that the space is clean. Most rooms have a display showing standard set-up. Please ask in the office if you don't find one posted.
- Be sure audio-visual and computer equipment are returned to standard set-up and where appropriate, returned to storage. If your SIG's activities produce any disarray, appoint members to supervise clean-up after each meeting. Please have staff approve the service of food and drink.
- Keep in mind that any files or programs left on classroom or computer room computers will be deleted automatically overnight.
- The use of the art room (RC230) and disposal of hazardous materials is covered by a separate set of guidelines that are posted in the Art Room. Contact Leanna Preston for more information.
- We ask that all activities that take place at the Reuter Center or under the name of OLLI groups meet the standards and values of our program. We reserve the right to ask SIGs to discontinue activity that does not meet these standards, and we reserve the right to discontinue scheduling any SIG that does not meet the suggested guidelines.

## **Joining SIGs**

- Each SIG must designate a contact person who provides information about the SIG to potential members and to the staff and Hospitality Committee at OLLI. The contact is often the coordinator but may be a different person.
- OLLI members who wish to join a SIG are encouraged to call or email the contact to confirm meeting times and locations. The contact information is published in OLLI's four term catalogs, on the website, and in information posted at the Reuter Center.
- People who are listed as contacts must be prepared to return requests for information about your SIG in a timely manner.
- Some SIGs are at capacity. If there is no more space in a SIG, please notify the OLLI office so that we can make appropriate notation on our website.

## **Current OLLI membership is required for regular participation in SIGs**

- Visitors who wish to learn more about OLLI or about a specific SIG are welcome to visit one time, with the permission of the SIG coordinator. To continue participating, individuals must become OLLI members by using the online registration system.
- SIG coordinators are responsible for collecting the names of all current SIG members and submitting an accurate attendance roster by the end of March, June, September and December every year. Rosters will be submitted to Pascale Couturier-Armstrong, who will confirm that all reported participants are members of the organization. She will then tabulate attendance.
- Pascale will notify SIG coordinators of any participants on the roster who are not members and will confirm with the SIG coordinator when a participant becomes a member. SIG coordinators are expected to remind participants to renew membership and to ask non-members not to participate in the SIG. OLLI staff is happy to support SIG coordinators in these efforts.
- If SIG participants park on campus, they must display a valid UNC Asheville parking decal.

## **Record Keeping and Communication**

- SIG coordinators should keep an up-to-date list of their members that includes email addresses and phone numbers in order to communicate with participants regularly.
- Use the Blind Carbon Copy line (BCC) in all correspondence with the group to ensure the privacy of participants. If there is a contact list prepared for SIG participants, the coordinator must obtain everyone's permission to include contact information and must make every effort to keep the list up-to-date.
- Pascale Couturier-Armstrong works with the coordinators to create rosters of participants. These rosters will be circulated at each meeting of the SIG to provide information about participation levels. If there are changes in the level of attendance, the SIG Chair will work with relevant parties to assess new needs.
- When communicating with SIG members, please make sure that only SIG business is discussed. Your SIG member list is not to be used for any purpose other than to announce meetings or to communicate to the group as a whole. A SIG coordinator or OLLI staff member may bar a member's participation in a SIG for inappropriate use of email.
- SIGs encourage both learning and friendship. Sometimes a conversation that begins with everyone's consent becomes heated or unwelcome. Please remember that we expect everyone who enjoys SIGs to be responsible for their own communication. OLLI staff avoids intervening in personal concerns.

## **Recruiting and Publicity**

Each SIG is responsible for recruiting participants, notifying members in advance of meetings, generating their own publicity and communication materials, and keeping information published about the SIG up to date. While SIG Coordinators may be responsible for this, some SIGs designate other members to be responsible for publicity, communication, and recruiting. A variety of methods are available for publicizing SIG activities and recruiting new members. Please note the contact person for each method below:

- **Flyers (up to 8.5 X 11") may be posted on the bulletin board on the upper level of the Reuter Center or in the kiosk on the lower level.** These may be turned in at the reception desk in Room 208. Address them to the attention of Pascale Couturier-Armstrong or email them to Pascale at [pcouturi@unca.edu](mailto:pcouturi@unca.edu).
- **The SIG List with information contacts** is published on the OLLI website, in catalogs, and on bulletin boards. Please send updates to Leanna Preston ([lp Preston@unca.edu](mailto:lp Preston@unca.edu)).
- **Weekly email newsletter**—If you are trying to get a new SIG up and running, would like to invite new members to the SIG or if your events are open to the general membership and a general announcement to all members would be appropriate, please contact Leanna Preston ([lp Preston@unca.edu](mailto:lp Preston@unca.edu)) by Wednesday in order to include that information in the weekly email newsletter that is distributed on Sundays.

### **Notification of Changes or Problems**

- Immediately notify Pascale Couturier-Armstrong and Leanna Preston if your SIG's coordinator or contact changes, or if there are changes in the responsibility for group activities like scheduling or publicity. This is important for groups with multiple subgroups. We try our best to make sure that our website and catalog are up to date, but we rely on SIG coordinators to keep us informed.
- Notify Leanna Preston and Pascale Couturier-Armstrong of changes in your group's regular meeting schedule. Again, we want to make sure that all of our sources of information are up-to-date.
- Notify Leanna Preston and Pascale Couturier-Armstrong about one-time changes in your SIG's meeting time, and please communicate schedule changes to all active members of your group.
- Notify the Hospitality Committee chairs of any SIG attendance problems, the need for a new SIG coordinator that you cannot meet through the members of the group, or any other problems with the running of your SIG. We want to support SIGs in sustaining membership and in meeting the needs of OLLI members.
- Notify any OLLI staff member of any situations at the Reuter Center that may require a staff member to follow through (including issues of the use and safety of the facility or the safety and satisfaction of SIG members).

### **Emergencies**

- In the event of any emergency, you should contact UNC Asheville police at 828-251-6710. All UNC Asheville police are trained as first responders, and they arrive quickly on the scene and summon Asheville EMS teams and direct them to the appropriate place on campus. Notify 911 for any emergencies off-campus.
- There are defibrillators on the upper and lower levels right outside the restrooms of the Reuter Center.
- If alarms sound, please exit your room in an orderly way and make your way to parking lot on the west side of the building (the area closest to Campus View Drive). Wait until you have been cleared to come back in. If the alarm sounds, emergency services are on the way. OLLI staff has a protocol for managing emergencies, but some SIGs meet after hours. In these cases, SIG leaders are our allies in making sure that the building is evacuated and that no one re-enters until conditions are safe.