Instructor Biographies

Ernest Ayo received his pharmacy degree from ULM Monroe, his RN from LSU-E, and his CRNA from Missouri State in anesthesia. He was mentored by Web Cochran of Red Stick Croquet of BR. Ernest founded Panache Croquet in West Feliciana and taught an OLLI spring course on croquet in 2021.

Leah Barron received her BA and J.D. in political science from LSU. A former defense attorney and administrative counsel to the Louisiana Senate, she was the Exec. Director, then CEO, of a non-profit state high risk health insurance plan. She is passionate American Revolutionary War History.

Agnes Bickham is a Yoga Alliance ERYT with experience of 1,000+ teaching hours. She received her Teacher Certification from Shambhava School of Yoga in Kona, Hawaii and has practiced and taught Hatha Yoga variations in the Baton Rouge area.

Donald Beale, director for Online Distance Learning at LSU Online & Continuing Education, has a MALA from LSU in general humanities with an emphasis in film studies. He has also done graduate study in English, concentrating on American literature and film.

Thomas Beard has a Ph.D. from Duke University and is an alumni professor emeritus of economics at LSU. He has taught thirty-seven opera courses for the Lagniappe Chapter of OLLI at LSU.

Kathleen Benedetto, currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography, is studying hurricanes, rapid intensification, climate change, and population preparedness in the Gulf Coast.

Kim Bergeron is an advertising, marketing and public relations specialist who holds a BFA in Applied Arts/Advertising from ULL and Accreditation in Public Relations from the Public Relations Society of America.

Mike Berkowitz has his master’s degree from the Univ. of Massachusetts at Amherst and taught all levels before finding his niche teaching seniors. Mike enjoys helping folks to think in new ways and to gain new perspectives.

Jim Bolner received his bachelor’s degree in education from LSU, his master’s from LSU in government, his Ph.D. in political science from the Univ. of Virginia. He has taught at the Univ. of Alabama and the Univ. of Massachusetts at Amherst before coming to LSU in 1967.

Henry Bradsher holds two bachelor’s degrees from the Univ. of Missouri in arts and in journalism. He served three years as an Air Force intelligence officer and 26 years as a journalist reporting many historical topics. Henry spent 18 years as a CIA senior analyst.

Monica Bradsher graduated from Swarthmore College with an AB in history. She received her M.Ed. from Harvard Univ. Monica lived in Russia from 1964-68 and is a fluent Russian speaker.
Sabrina Cervantez is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the LSU history department. She specializes in modern British History with a focus on the 19th century. Sabrina is currently writing her dissertation on the British Empire and the Opening of Japan.

Harsha E. Chacko is a professor emeritus of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Administration at UNO where he taught for 33 years. He has completed the requirements for the Certified Specialist of Wine from the Society of Wine Educators.

Phil Chenevert has an MA in counseling. Phil loves to collect stories about the weird and fascinating origins of our English words and phrases. These four ZOOM classes will give you fun things to share with others about our language.

Caroline Cocciardi, writer and filmmaker, received her BA from San Jose State Univ. She began an independent study on Leonardo da Vinci, while living in Rome. Her 20-year research led to a da Vinci discovery which is featured in her documentary, “Mona Lisa Revealed.”

Charlotte Collins received art degrees from LSU and UNO, and an MFA from Memphis College of Art. She was an Associate Professor of Art at Kennesaw State Univ. and taught at SELU. She is the Director of the Olde Towne Arts Center and currently teaches at University View Academy.

Erica Daigle, Ph.D., is a native of Louisiana and received her BS and MA from LSU. Her Ph.D. work at the University of Iowa was on English Renaissance literature and medical history, especially Shakespeare. Erica has taught writing, British literature, Biblical and classical literature, and Shakespeare courses at the college level.

Tommy Draughn is an IT professional with 25 years of experience in the corporate, non-profit, and small-business sectors. As the owner of an IT consulting and support company, Tommy has a passion for demystifying technology for people of all ages so they can use and enjoy their electronic devices.

Claire Fontenot has been a Master Gardener for 20 years. She developed an American Daylily Society display garden, the Louisiana Iris, and ginger garden displays at the BREC Independence Botanic Garden. She continues to provide students with information about gardening at home.

Charlie Fryling obtained his BS in landscape architecture from Syracuse Univ. and his MS from Harvard Univ. He worked for an international landscape architecture firm. He also worked at LSU in the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture. He uses many photographs in his lectures that he has taken.

Paul Graham received his Ph.D. in English, with a concentration in American film from LSU and his master’s, from UNO, in British medieval literature. At OLLI, Dr. Graham has as taught Beowulf, The Canterbury Tales, and American film.
Jerisse Grantham, certified to teach by Dance Masters of America, she teaches all forms of dance at the studio and at schools in the Baton Rouge area. She is a 15-year adjunct faculty member of Tulane Univ. She earned her BS from LSU and has enjoyed teaching dance for more than 30 years.

Lawrence “Sal” Guidry, Ph.D., has been a licensed psychologist for over 40 years. He was a staff psychologist at VA Medical Center for 27, a clinical associate psychology professor in the Dept. of Psychiatry at Tulane Medical School, and in the Dept. of Psychiatry at LSU Medical School.

Pat Heurtin received her BA from SLU and a Masters + 30 hours with emphasis in health education from LSU. She retired from teaching and from the National YMCA as a Physical Director of the YMCA in Lake Charles. Pat received training in pickleball and is a certified instructor from Third Shot Sports.

Dwayne Hinton is a veteran who also served as a police officer. He has his BRCC Associates in biology and social sciences and bachelor’s in journalism, anthropology, and interdisciplinary (psychology, sociology, G.I.S.) from LSU. He is enrolled at LSU to obtain his master’s degree in anthropology.

Rich Hirsch has a BA in political science from LSU and is a certified Project Management Professional. He is an expert in nuclear plant operations and managing radioactive materials. His work was in the US, England, Taiwan, Ukraine, and the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone.

Trenton James is a retired board-certified family physician and is now working online for eQHealth Solutions, Inc., a population health management company for government and commercial clients. He champions quality of healthcare for all patients and patient safety.

Relius Johnson is currently the Asst. Director of Multicultural Affairs at the Univ. of Texas at Arlington. He is an alumnus of Texas A&M Univ., Univ. of Central Arkansas, and LSU and is currently working on his Ph.D. at LSU.

Robert Kelley is a retired captain of 26 years for the Department of Corrections. He also served for 10 years as the ambassador for USAPA Association. Robert has been playing pickleball for 12 years and has been a PPR (Professional Pickleball Registry) member for the past two years.

Owen Kemp has been a yoga instructor for many years and received her yoga training through the Living Yoga program at the Barsana Dham Ashram in Austin, TX. She attended training sessions at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, NY. and various venues around the country and internationally.

Linda Lightfoot has a BA in journalism and political science from the Univ. of Mississippi. She is retired from The Advocate where she worked for 42 years, the last 15 as executive editor. She has put together more than 20 OLLI courses with guest lecturers on Louisiana institutions and issues.

Merrie Lee Logan, originally from Iowa, attended the Univ. of Iowa and La Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, before moving to Louisiana and graduating from LSU with a degree in Spanish, French, and English. She taught in public and private high schools for almost twenty years.
**Edwin Lyon**, a retired archaeologist, and historian with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in New Orleans, received his Ph.D. in history from LSU as well as his MA in anthropology. He taught Mississippi River courses for 10 years at Tulane Univ. as well as other courses on travel and history.

**Fara Mabrey** is a native of Italy who has taught Italian and French in schools in both Italy and France. She has a bachelor’s degree in foreign languages from the Universita' Di Bari and has lived in Switzerland and France for extended periods of time.

**William “Bill” McClendon** received his BA in history and his LL.B law degree at Tulane Univ. He practiced banking and business law for 40 years in Baton Rouge. Bill also taught negotiations and professionalism at LSU, Univ. of Tennessee, and Western Carolina Univ.

**Betty “BJ” McRae** was the Asst. to the Director of the Atchafalaya Basin Program. BJ was responsible for completing the agendas, the necessary papers for the committee meetings, as well as coordinating the ribbon ceremonies for many recreational and water management projects.

**Marchita Mauck**, a retired professor of art history at LSU, received her Ph.D. in medieval studies from Tulane Univ. She was also a visiting professor at Yale Univ., Notre Dame Univ., and Chicago Theology Graduate Union. She leads tour groups to Europe to sites covered in her OLLI courses.

**Olivia McNeely Pass** has her Ph.D. in English and American literature from ULL and two master’s degrees from LSU (English and journalism). She taught in Louisiana's high schools for 22 years and for 15 years in Louisiana's public universities before retiring.

**Jane Patterson**, current president and education chair of Baton Rouge Audubon Society, was honored at the National Audubon national conference and received the Dutcher award for outstanding service for her efforts in bird-related education.

**TroyLynne Perrault** is a Pampered Chef Consultant whose passion is to help people make healthier food choices. TroyLynne holds a master’s degree in public administration from UNO and is a licensed Realtor in Louisiana who has worked at three universities in New Orleans.

**Brian Pope**, MA from Univ. of Texas at Austin, performs the creative and hosting duties for Center Stage on WRKF-FM, a weekly one-hour radio show. He was inducted into Theater BR’s Hall of Fame and is also an adjunct instructor at NSU in Natchitoches where he teaches Musical Theater History and Literature.

**Sue Potts**, Educational Specialist Education LSU, was a guide at the Old State Capitol, Old Governor's Mansion, New Governor's Mansion and a riverboat guide for Baton Rouge and several plantations.

**Lee Brandt Randall** received her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1979. She taught studio art and art history for 30 years, 24 of those years spent at the Runnels School in Baton Rouge.
Darlene Reaves, a retired high school science teacher, holds a MAST (Master of Arts in Science Teaching) degree. During her 10 years at the New Orleans Center for Science and Math, she taught the course “Wildlife Biology” which focused on birds and mammals and including birding.

Penny Reinhardt received her BS in Education, Science, and Math from LSU. She taught 8th grade science at Bryan-College Station in Texas for three years. Penny has been crafting since before she was 14 years old and has taught classes in crochet and other crafts locally.

Marie Ricca, initially trained in Taekwondo, she received her black belt in Shotokan from Mikame Sensei with JKA and later acquired her second degree. She received a black belt in Shorin Ryu Kubudo (weapons). She presently teaches Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan.

Martha Robson, pre-pandemic, she directed the duplicate bridge game at St. James Place. She believes that playing bridge is one of the best things you can do for your brain, and she loves helping people learn how to approach this complex and fascinating game.

Ralph Schomburg obtained a BS in mathematics and an MBA in finance. He worked at the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center and retired as the Asst. CFO of NASA JSC. He has received many NASA awards, trained others in the National Management Assoc., and was a part-time instructor at San Jacinto College.

Jane Simmons has taught yoga for over fifteen years and has developed a style and pace that is approachable for all levels. Yoga is an essential aspect of fitness, especially regarding flexibility and balance as the aging process threatens many of OLLI's members.

Mark Stahl, retired from university administration still serves as a consultant to regional institutions. He was a manager of medical education for Indiana Univ. School of Medicine and the Exec. Director of the UNO downtown center. He has a master’s degree from Indiana Univ. and completed all course work for an Ed.D.

William Stickle received his Ph.D. from the Univ. of Saskatchewan, Regina in biology with a minor in oceanography. He taught Marine Communities, Environmental Physiology and Human Physiology. He also developed the LSU Marine Biology in Southeast Alaska Program.

Dr. Julius R. Tipton is a professional musician/composer with degrees from Mississippi College (BA), LSU (M.Mus.), New Orleans Baptist Seminary (M.C.E., Ed. D.) and Austin Presbyterian Seminary (M.Div.). He has taught at Xavier Univ. and served as a pastor in various locations.

Greg Tomlinson received his Ph.D. in history from (LSU) in August 2020. He has taught courses about German identity, the Third Reich, and the life of Napoleon Bonaparte for LSU's OLLI program.
Emily Toth (Ph. D., Johns Hopkins), in her second century of teaching about women writers, focuses on women's lives. Her published books include books under the name "Ms. Mentor," biographies of Kate Chopin and Grace Metalious, and a prize-winning Civil War novel.

Ken Tremblay received his BA in history and anthropology from Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL and his MA in anthropology from LSU.” He has experience in museum, field, and classroom settings. His areas of study include human skeletal biology and the archaeology of health and disease in the past.

Dr. Francis W Vanderwall is a professor emeritus of theology at Franciscan Univ. in Baton Rouge. He is a theologian, the author of six books, a TV series, and several audio programs on various Theological and Spiritual topics. He was a Jesuit priest for almost thirty years.

Kirk Vidrine, working as a fitness professional for over 18 years including five years developing wellness programs for Shell Oil, has an BS in dietetics and a master’s in human nutrition from LSU. He has presented at national conferences, researched nutrition and body composition, bone health, and bio compounds.

Dr. Elizabeth Wallace recently completed her Ph.D. from LSU with an emphasis on voice health and acoustics. She has directed numerous choirs in our area and has brought her enthusiasm and exciting new ideas to the Baton Rouge Chorus of Sweet Adelines.

Barry Weinstein was ordained a reform rabbi in June 1971, by Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is also a Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation B’nai Israel in Baton Rouge and currently a rabbi of Temple Sinai in Lake Charles.

Vernon Lee Wright received his bachelor's degree from Iowa State Univ. in wildlife management, his MA from Purdue in wildlife biology, and his Ph.D. from Washington State Univ. in Zoology. He has a post-doctoral from Cornell Univ. in biometrics. At LSU, he was an experimental statistician helping faculty and students in design and analysis.