

$q(120) = 0.04 - 0.000837t$
 $q = 0.04 / (1 - e^{-0.000837t})$
 $120 \frac{dq}{dt} = -0.005 - 0.1q$
 $q(15) = 0 \times 10$
 $q(t) = -0.05 + C e^{-0.000837t}$
 $q(0) = 6.66 \times 10^{-2}$
 $C = 0.09015$



Lois Magenau takes notes during the mathematics course.



New London's *Adventures* in Learning

*From Literature to Travel,
 Adult Enrichment Program
 Provides Lifelong Learning*



BY *Kim J. Gifford*
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The meeting room at Tracy Memorial Library in New London is a buzz as 20 or so seniors, mostly women, filter in, choosing seats around two long tables and striking up lively conversation. Except for the age of the participants, the scene is similar to that taking place on many college campuses each morning. Yet, the energy here is palpable. Rather than showing up clad in sweats, these students have donned colorful blouses or sweaters; their hair just so. Instead of clutching a much-needed cup of coffee, they arrive carrying books and ideas to exchange. They are eager to embrace the subject at hand.

Julie Machen, a petite powerhouse of a lecturer, begins an enthusiastic talk on Victorian England, specifically this day, on Queen Victoria and her heirs. Although Machen spends most of the class lecturing, everyone in the room seems engaged. Why not? These are, after all, adult learners — housewives, educators, business people — who come to the class with time to sit back, study and even teach a subject that interests them.

Engage your mind

This class is just one of many taking place in town as part of Adventures in Learning, an adult enrichment program sponsored by Colby-Sawyer College in New London. In fact, this same day, down the street in the Lake Sunapee Bank Community Room, another group of adult learners is taking a math course that addresses “the wow factor” of mathematics, including some amazing properties of numbers.

Other courses run the gamut from a scientific examination of “The Elements of Life” to one on Gilbert and Sullivan. An eight-week lecture series on “The Enlightenment” has drawn as many as 94 participants, the most for a course of this kind. Some classes are lecture based; others focus on discussion. Some are largely attended by women; others by men. Some attract a good mix of both. All who come seem drawn by a common goal — a desire to learn that, for most, has now become a lifelong adventure.

Members pay a \$40 fee for each academic year, which runs from July 1 to June 30, then an additional amount for each course. A regular eight-week course costs \$35 while a mini-course, running three or four sessions, costs \$20. It was Machen, in fact, who introduced the first mini-course last spring when she taught a class on Revolutionary Virginia. Members, sometimes planning vacations, liked the flexibility afforded by these shorter runs.

Typically, Adventures in Learning runs three semesters of 10 to 12 courses each, offered in the fall, mid-winter and

spring. Classes — noncredit with no required exams — have anywhere from 12 to 20 participants. “These numbers vary quite a bit depending on the flavor of the course,” says Dick Cogswell, current president of Adventures in Learning.

Today, the program has 403 members, with an average of 60 new members for the past three years. Although the program is open to all adults, 95 percent of participants are retired.

The wow factor

Some courses seem to be more popular than others, and Adventures in Learning’s curriculum committee “takes a look at what kinds of courses are the most popular and survey students’ interests,” says Sharon Ames, manager of public programs and stewardship for Colby-Sawyer College. “We almost always have a literature course each semester and something on history. We have run a class on the Civil War for four years and each time there seems to be a waiting list.”

Julien LeBourgeois, retired president of the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., co-taught the Civil War course, which had between 30 and 40 students. He has lectured on General Douglas MacArthur and, most recently, on French philosopher Voltaire as part of the Enlightenment series. He has also taught a course on the “Legacy of Napoleon,” addressing the effects of Napoleon’s governing.

Because retirees have the time to travel, many enjoy classes on other countries such as Cuba, Japan and China.

“Topical subjects such as the Arab-Israeli conflict or the DaVinci Code are also huge draws,” says Ames. Art Rosen, a frequent speaker on issues of religion, taught a course last fall entitled “Breaking the DaVinci Code,” exploring Jesus’ relationship with Mary Magdalene and other subjects raised by Dan Brown’s highly publicized novel. Events since 9/11 have sparked an interest in the politics of the Middle East.

New London resident Nancy Malm chooses courses based on the teacher. “I’m aware of who is doing the talking,” she says. “You can appreciate who is a good teacher and who isn’t.”

Adventures in Learning’s students are devoted to the program. One 95-year-old woman takes two to three courses a semester and has “since day one,” says LeBourgeois. “She has only missed one semester and that was when she was recovering from a broken leg.”

The vavoom of volunteers

With the exception of Ames and program assistant Janet St. Laurent, all those involved with Adventures in Learning are volunteers. Since the program’s inception in 1998, there have been 97 study leaders, many who come from a background in education, but others who simply have an interest in teaching and exploring a favorite topic.

Machen first attended a course before teaching one of her own. “Participating in a course is a great way to meet people and, if you are new here, get a feel for the area,” she says.

In fact, most of the instructors are students, seamlessly navigating between attending classes and leading them. A number of people taking classes also help out with the program, either serving on the board or as part of a committee. In fact, it is difficult to find an Adventures in Learning student who has not become further involved in some capacity — even if it’s just spreading the word about the program to their friends and neighbors.

“Volunteerism is alive and well in this area,” says LeBourgeois, who first took the Enlightenment course before going on to teach. “People want to do all kinds of things that they were not able to when they were raising their families and active professionally.”



(Left) Ann Loeffler enjoys the class on Victorian England.



(Right) Instructor Dick Little works math magic at the blackboard.



(Left) Julie Machen leads a discussion on Victorian England.

(Right) John Ford listens intently to a lecture on the amazing properties of numbers.

LeBourgeois teaches subjects in which he has an interest. “I end up doing the research and learning a lot more about the subject than I did when I started. I was encouraged to do this in the first course I took at ILEAD (Institute for Lifelong Education at Dartmouth) when Adventures in Learning was just a gleam in our eye,” he says. “The course on the Spanish Civil War was led by a retired cardiologist. He said, ‘This is an important segment of history. I don’t know anything about it, therefore, I will lead a course on it.’”

The instructors encourage this same approach in their students. “We like to end our courses with people knowing a lot more than they did before they started,” says LeBourgeois.

John Callahan, a former Adventures in Learning president and frequent student, says the program affords him the opportunity “to go back and reconsider topics I read a long time ago.” He explains that he always had difficulty getting a handle on James Joyce. After taking an Adventures in Learning course on the author, he was able to approach him with new insight. “The courses have allowed me to take on subjects that I might not have tackled on my own,” Callahan says.

Charles Carey — the program’s first president, teacher and student — finds that he is drawn to classes related to current events. “Whether it be science questions, environmental questions or history, I like courses that apply to what is going on in the headlines today,” he says.

Always learning

“I believe you should continue your education throughout your life,” says LeBourgeois.

This was the philosophy that set the program in motion eight years ago. A group of community members got together to explore the possibility of developing a continuing education program in the greater New London area. Many of this initial group had taken courses at ILEAD and wondered whether a similar program could be successful in their own region. It was LeBourgeois’ wife Priscilla who proposed the name “Adventures in Learning.”

“We knew without the support of Colby-Sawyer College we couldn’t succeed,” says LeBourgeois. The group approached Dr. Anne Ponder, the college’s president at the time. “When she became convinced that we were serious people on a serious mission, she gave us her whole hearted support.”


Ponder offered administrative and financial assistance, initially supporting Adventures in Learning as a two-year pilot program. The first semester of five classes kicked off in the fall of 1998. Early offerings included courses on the Soviet Union, genetic engineering and simplifying wine. The program drew 210 members. “We have been quite successful from day one proving that the need for such a program was indeed substantial,” says LeBourgeois.

Colby-Sawyer’s support continues today. “Colby-Sawyer has sponsored and supported the Adventures in Learning program throughout — we are complet-

ing our eighth year — and will continue to do so for the near future,” says Ames. “The college provides the administrative and supervisory staff necessary to perform and oversee the day-to-day activities of the program, and provides a classroom on campus for use by Adventures in Learning if they so choose.”

Over the last year, Adventures in Learning has also launched a number of new initiatives, including a summer lecture on a timely topic. The first lecture on stem cell research drew an audience of 159 — 79 of which were not members of the Adventures in Learning program. “I fully expect Adventures in Learning will end up being as large a program as the community can support,” says Ames.

Adventures in Learning also hosts a fall reception in hopes of attracting new teachers. The effort seems to be paying off. Last year, four people who attended the fall event offered courses.

“I’ve been involved in all sorts of civic programs of one sort or another and I’ve never been with a group as enthusiastic, as encouraging, as supportive and as talented as those who have been involved in Adventures in Learning,” LeBourgeois says. “In the early days, when we were pulling ourselves together, a task would come up and we’d never have to ask anyone to do it. Several hands would go up: ‘I’ll do it. I’ll do it.’ With that kind of support and enthusiasm, we couldn’t fail.” 

In her 13 years as a working writer, Kim Gifford has covered topics on just about everything you could imagine, including the kitchen sink, literally! When she’s not out on assignment, Kim is likely to be found teaching memoir writing at Lebanon College or catering to her precocious pugs, Buffy and Vader.

Paul Howe has been photographing professionally since 1980. He worked as a ski photographer for Waterville Valley from 1981 to 1986. From 1987 to 2005 he worked part time for the Argus Champion. Paul’s images have been published in many magazines and he also photographs weddings and takes portraits. Paul has his own Web site at www.paulhowephoto.com