

STARTING A SENIOR COLLEGE IN MAINE*
Maine Senior College Network
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
University of Southern Maine
May, 2002

Each Senior College group in Maine has followed a unique path from idea to reality. The steps listed below represent a summary of those paths. Each journey is unique, but each contains some or all of the elements below.

Step One: Make contact with the Maine Senior College Network

Contact the Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), University of Southern Maine (207)780-4076. The current Director is Kali Lightfoot

The Director of OLLI is also the coordinator of the Maine Senior College Network, which is a confederation of all of the Senior College groups in Maine.

Step Two: Foster a relationship with an educational institution

Each of the Senior College groups in Maine is an administrative unit of a University System campus or University College, or is organized as a non-profit that rents space and support from a campus/college. We also have one group that is affiliated with its local SAD Adult Education office because there are no University sites nearby.

It is important to be affiliated with an institution of higher learning, or with a respected educational institution, for many reasons: in-kind administrative support, perception that this is a legitimate educational venture, classroom space, properly audited financial oversight, etc.

Step Three: Convene a meeting of “movers and shakers”

Bring together a group of movers and shakers from the local communities that will be served by the Senior College. Look for people who can not only come up with new ideas, but can also follow through to bring those ideas to reality. This group should include, but not be limited to, people who are of an age (50+) to be members of Senior College.

Think about:

People who staff or serve on committees of local libraries, civic organizations, arts organizations, museum boards.

Museum docents

Political leaders: current or retired

Leaders of Adult Education or Community Education who need to understand what Senior College is and how it will relate to what they do.

Religious leaders

Retired teachers, professors and school/college administrators

The Steering Committee will also include one or more staff members from the sponsoring institution.

Invite Kali Lightfoot to this meeting. Kali will serve as resource person and will guide (but not chair) discussion at the meeting. She will bring a video and other materials that will help the group to understand the basic concepts of Senior College and how to start one.

By the end of this meeting the group will probably be able to form a Steering Committee that will go on to Step Four.

Step Four: Form a Steering Committee

The Steering Committee will probably include people who attended the “movers and Shakers” gathering as well as friends who were recruited after that first meeting.

The Steering Committee will do the actual work of starting a Senior College. At the first few meetings of this group, the agenda will cover topics including:

What is Senior College?

How is Senior College financed?

Election or appointment of a Committee Chairperson

Appointment of Committee Chairpeople: These may include

- Publicity/Membership Committee

 - Brochure

 - Press releases

 - Speakers to go out and recruit members from local groups

- Curriculum Committee

 - Recruiting faculty and creating a menu of courses for the brochure

 - Determining days and times of classes

 - Scheduling classrooms for the classes

- Volunteer Committee

 - Recruiting volunteers to build the corps of administrative volunteers who will handle the phone, organize mailings, register people, staff the office, etc.

- Open House Committee

 - Plan the first open house where people will come to find out about Senior College and register for the first semester of courses.

- Policies and By-Laws Committee

 - Drafting the by-laws of the organization (samples are available through the OLLI office). This activity creates the structure of policies that will govern the future Board and the organization as a whole.

- Special Events Committee

 - There will be opportunities prior to and after the start of classes to hold special lectures, film festivals, and gatherings of all sorts. These events serve to keep members “engaged” in Senior College activities during months when classes are not being held, as well as

providing alternate learning and socializing opportunities during the semester.

Newsletter

As the group grows larger, a newsletter can be an important communication tool and provide a way to advertise upcoming events. As with Special Events, the Newsletter will help members to stay “engaged” in Senior College during fallow times.

What do we want to call this operation?

(It doesn't have to include the appellation “Senior College.”)

What will our affiliation be?

The Senior College at University of Maine Hutchinson Center is a non-profit 501c3 organization which rents space at the Hutchinson Center. Most other Senior College groups are considered “administrative units” affiliated with parts of the University System which handle their financial oversight, liability insurance, etc. One group is a similar administrative unit of the SAD #44 Adult Education office.

Step Five: Formation of working committees from the list in Step Two

The committees might include people from the Steering Committee as well as friends who don't want to serve on the Steering Committee but would like to work on one particular aspect of developing a Senior College. Usually each Chairperson has autonomy to pick a committee.

The committees start work in their particular areas of responsibility, reporting back to meetings of the full Steering Committee. The job of the Steering Committee chair is really to make sure that the committees are doing their jobs and that plans are moving forward in some sort of coordinated fashion.

Step Six: The work of the committees creates the first semester of Senior College

The following tasks and decisions will create the character of the Senior College and will launch the first semester.

- *decide on a governance structure

- *agree on a physical space for programs and office functions

- *develop a relationship with the host “campus”

- *create a tuition structure

- *determine how revenue and expenses will be accounted for

- *create a working budget for the first year

- *recruit faculty and create a first semester of courses

- *publicize the starting of the college and create excitement

(This might be through an Open House. The Open House might happen before the courses are finalized – as a way to recruit faculty. Or the Open House might happen after the brochure is printed – as a way to recruit students. Or there might be two Open Houses.)

- *design a brochure to advertise the first semester

- *set up the registration system: including registration phone number, money intake system, volunteer staffing, photocopying, physical location, etc.

- *mail the brochure

Step Seven: When you have an official account, a plan, and your Steering Committee is committed and functioning well, ask for your “seed money”

The Maine legislature has made available \$5,000 in seed money to each new Senior College group. This money will pay for initial production of a brochure, as well as publicity and materials to hold an open house to attract members and registrants for the first semester, and other incidental costs of starting up. The startup process usually costs \$2500 or less, which leaves the group with a little nest egg. The funding for the Senior College Statewide Initiative is managed by the Director of OLLI.

Step Eight: Publicize, Publicize, Publicize

Try to create as many opportunities as possible for people in the community to see and hear about what you are doing. This might include: press releases; posters; radio and TV interviews; speakers going out to senior groups or other groups with lots of senior members; creating a speakers series prior to the first semester that showcases faculty; printing postcards or calling cards that members can give to friends, etc. The range of possibilities is endless. *Caveat:* Don't do so many things that you burn out your volunteers before Senior College even starts!

Step Nine: The First Semester and Beyond

Concurrent with the launch of the first semester is usually the launch of the official Board of Directors or whatever group will form the leadership and governance structure of the Senior College on an ongoing basis. Most Senior College groups have an Annual Meeting in the Fall or Spring where a nominating committee presents the leadership slate for vote of the membership. At the first Annual Meeting, the initial Board is voted into office. At subsequent Annual Meetings vacancies on the Board are filled. The first Board should normally include any members of the Steering Committee who want to continue.

The Board takes over the reins and begins to plan the second semester. Some Senior Colleges in Maine register for the next semester in person on the final day of the previous semester. Other groups hold a membership open house for registration before each semester starts. Yet others do all of their registration by mail. The various systems all work. The key is making sure that brochures get out to members and interested non-members in time for people to make a decision and enroll. The earlier the better in terms of keeping enthusiasm high. The case for “in person” registration of some sort is that it increases opportunities for social interaction among the membership – always a good thing. It also generates a lot of contagious enthusiasm for Senior College.

Always important is the work of building and maintaining a good relationship between the leadership and members of a Senior College and the staff, faculty and students of the host “campus.” Never miss an opportunity to engage, appreciate and collaborate with the host institution. There is a lot of “in kind” contribution made by the host campus to the success of a Senior College and it is important to recognize that.