

NEW OLLI INSTRUCTORS / FALL 2020

Esragul Bayraktar is teaching “Rumi and the Divine Love.” Esra holds a PhD in mysticism from Ankara University, an MA in communication from Michigan State University, and a BA in English literature from Hacettepe University. She worked at Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul, Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and Michigan State University.

Kathleen Beach is co-teaching “Frontiers in Medicine” with veteran OLLI instructor Ed Cox. Kathleen is a newly retired physician/epidemiologist. Educated in biochemical engineering and internal medicine, she worked at the FDA, then at biotech and pharmaceutical companies in Boston and RTP, where she led numerous drug programs from preliminary trials through approval for human use.

Alita Bluford is teaching “Good Conversations, Good Relationships.” Alita earned an MS from Eastern Michigan University in human resources / organizational development. She has extensive experience in managing interpersonal communications and has studied the misunderstandings that occur between multiple generations. Her experiences with different workplace and employee demographics have ignited her passion to make lives better by improving communication.

Kennith Chiha is teaching “Ethics & the Human Condition.” Ken earned BA degrees in religious and political philosophy and in government (Franklin & Marshall College), an MTS degree in moral theology (Notre Dame), and an MA degree, along with PhD work, in Christian ethics (Loyola University Chicago). His interests include theology, ethics, and political theory.

Rachel Coyte is teaching “Wine, Bees and Bones.” Rachel is a PhD candidate at Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment. Her work deals mostly with issues of water quality, from salinization in arid environments to contamination from fossil fuels.

Linda Hubbard Curtis is teaching “The Black Experience in America.” The daughter of a second-generation African American dentist, Linda was born at Duke Hospital to a third-generation Durham family. Her father relocated his family to Los Angeles to escape the Jim Crow laws. Linda earned her undergraduate and master's degrees from North Carolina Central University and her PhD in education from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

Robbin Emmons is teaching “Explorations in Black Culture.” Robbin is a social entrepreneur and owner of Robin Emmons Consulting. She has been recognized by CNN Heroes, 50 Most Influential Women, and Athena International, and has been covered in national and local media. She is a Global Eisenhower Fellow and William C. Friday Fellow for Human Relations.

Virginia Gray has joined the facilitating team for “The World Today.” Virginia taught political science at the universities of Kentucky, Minnesota, and North Carolina before her retirement. She also held visiting appointments at the University of Oslo, University of British Columbia, and Tianjin University in Nankai, China. She did election night survey analysis for NBC News in the 1980s.

Carol Dukes Hamilton is teaching “Pandemics & Plagues” Carol is an infectious diseases physician and emeritus Duke professor with more than 100 peer-reviewed publications. Her career spans work in the US, Asia, and Africa.

Chris Holaday is teaching “Baseball in North Carolina.” Chris is a graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill and has a master's degree in history from North Carolina Central University. He is a member of the NC Association of Historians, the Society for American Baseball Research, and has written several books on baseball.

Kenneth Luker is teaching “A Purposeful Practice.” Kenneth attended Texas A&M, University of Cambridge, and Harvard University Graduate School of Design. A design principal for Perkins & Will North Carolina, he is a member of the Leaders Council of the NC State University College of Design, periodically teaching. He received the Kamphoefner Prize from the American Institute of Architects for career excellence in modern architectural design.

John Matthews is teaching “Eisenhower: 1890-1945.” John is a former high school American history teacher who holds two graduate degrees from Duke. He's visited major WWII battlefields, interviewed war veterans and French Resistance members for the National WWII Museum, and researched in the Eisenhower, Marshall, and Franklin Roosevelt archives.

Maria Piskor is teaching “Oy! A Play on Improv, Virtually.” Maria began her 30-year career as a stage manager, designer, and director of a popular street theater in New York City. She is now a working teaching artist and a national-award-winning docent. She infuses theater into teaching science, writing, and art history for effective learning.

John Prager is teaching “A Hitchhiker's Guide to AI.” John recently retired from a career in AI research at IBM. He has built many intelligent systems over the last 45 years, including the Watson system that won "Jeopardy!" in 2011. He has degrees in AI, computer science, and mathematics from the University of Cambridge and the University of Massachusetts. He has about 100 publications, including books, research papers, and patents.

Joe Simpson is teaching “Abraham Lincoln.” Joe has a BA in history from UNC and has researched and studied Abraham Lincoln, slavery, and the Civil War era for 30 years. His lectures have focused on Lincoln's rise to political power and his presidency from 1854 to 1865, and the impact of slavery in America. Joe is a member of the Lincoln Forum, and he has given lectures on Lincoln at the OLLI at NC State.

Nicholas Tennyson is teaching “Transportation in North Carolina.” Nick served two terms as mayor of the City of Durham and was secretary of transportation for North Carolina. He is a Duke graduate and former naval officer, home builder, and trade association executive for three different nonprofits, including three years as vice president of government relations for the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR NEW INSTRUCTORS!