

Comments from students

“This is the BEST OLLI class ever! I will take it in the fall. Excellent speakers”

“Fantastic course – so many insights into life in America today. I would take it a second time to absorb more.”

“Wonderful course. Opened my eyes to a very broad scope – could have just focused on incarceration”

“Well organized - so informative. Thank you!”

“One of the most moving and educational courses I have ever taken.”

“Excellent course with wonderful well informed speakers and informative Q&A sessions. Mark did a fine job of moderating.”

“This was one of the best courses in OLLI I have ever taken. Incredible speakers.”

“Excellent course; Mark was great and the people he brought in were excellent. I wish we had a chance to reflect on the entire course together. I also think a website will help, bringing everything together. Also it would be good to provide a little structure around identifying opportunities for engagement and fostering opportunities for course participants to meet after the course is over so they could dive deeper into these issues if they wish.”

“This class got better and better every week. I have volunteered at Urban Ministries of Durham for 12 years, which is why I took this class. I’ve learned a lot and feel more hopeful.”

“Mind blowing!”

“PLEASE provide course website with copies of the presentations so I can reference statistics and info presented.”

“Truly the BEST OLLI course I’ve taken in the past 5 years. Fascinating topic with excellent relevant speakers each week. Extremely articulate speakers each week. Information everyone should have presented to them.”

“A website with links & info that we could use to connect to organizations would be great. This class has been very challenging as well as incredibly informational. Thank you.”

“This was a FABULOUS course! Each class went so fast! I’ll write a full description in my email to Mark. As for the room, it was incredibly hot (and we still stayed alert!) very uncomfortable. And I generally sat in the 2nd row & couldn’t see the screen or speaker. Putting this class into a tiered room (Richard white theatre maybe Duke? Or maybe a movie theatre (NorthGate? Carolina?) They’re not generally in use in the morning.”

“I have learned so SO much. Incredible class in every way. Thank you, Mark!”

Here are the responses I received when I asked my students *“Why did you register for this class?”*

Just wanted to thank you for your courage in being so transparent in sharing your story and yourself to all of us. This class is so, so informative and real- the stories that are shared by so many!

Thank you again!!! This class will need a larger area to meet next fall!

I wanted to tell you how much I’m enjoying your OLLI class. I’ve been taking OLLI classes for five years, and your course is the only one I’ve never had to consider ‘cutting.’ I’m taking three other courses and have missed at least one day of each. Your class is always an unreasonable entry on my calendar.

I also wanted you to know that although I certainly feel much compassion for your terrible ordeal during the past ten years, I am extremely inspired by your courage and honesty in the efforts you are making to enlighten us about these issues. You have done an amazing amount of work to put together each fascinating class.

Throughout the course, I have been hoping for someone to indicate whether or not groups or institutions are desirous of help from the public in terms of volunteering. I am an unsatisfied retiree and am always looking for meaningful opportunities to contribute. I am hoping that in your communications with your speakers, you might suggest that they address any volunteer needs.

Again, I want to emphasize my admiration and respect for your willingness to set forth the realities of your experience and for your skill in capturing our hearts and minds.

I am a volunteer for Dress for Success, helping low income women prepare job seeking skills and attain employment. I am taking the class because I want a better understanding of the underlying issues many of my clients are facing. I admit ignorance of the many complex issues challenging these women every day. I am also working on not judging people as harshly as I have in the past.

My past is complicated in that my sister was raped and murdered in 1975 at the age of 22. The justice system has been on the periphery of my life since I was in college. Her killer is in the NJ State prison and my family appears at the parole hearings every time they come up, a constant reminder of this deplorable act and the absence of the sister I loved.

I just wanted to let you know that our OLLi class just seems to get better and more compelling every week. I had no idea when I signed up for this class that it was going to be so powerful. Thank you, thank you for putting this together. I truly rejoice that so many people are in the class and that we have the opportunity to have our hearts and eyes be opened to some difficult and very important realities that impact such a considerable segment of our population.

Thank you for this introduction to the speakers for this week. I find it to be helpful to know ahead of time who the speakers are, it helps me to think through some questions I might have.

Also, in answer to your question of last week, I am taking this class because it sounded (in the OLLI catalogue) like it was serious and I know nothing about incarcerated, homeless or addicted, and I want to know. I consider myself as naïve, I believe people, but I find that I am misled because I am naïve. In addition, classes I have taken through OLLI are hit and miss. The volcano class was pretty good, but there were people who came to class and slept through it. The mushroom drawing class was essentially tracing the picture of a mushroom and then coloring it in - that is not drawing!!

So, I am delighted that your class is serious, informative and real. People are engaged in it.

Many thanks for restoring my faith in OLLI and in those who are trying to present meaningful classes

Our first class was very interesting and I am now even happier that I signed up for this class than before. The topic of incarceration — of mass incarceration — in our country is critical, timely, and is one that must be understood better. I will admit that your story surprised me, as I had a preconception in my mind of who you might be, and what your story might have been. I think it is wonderful that you are using your 10-year experience to help increase awareness of the issues of incarceration, homelessness, and addiction. There is much to learn and understand.

To answer the question you have posed to the class, my interest stems from many years of working with Habitat for Humanity, Urban Ministries, tutoring at-risk kids, and Trosa. For several years, a friend of ours, who is very committed to prison ministry, was able to secure work release for several inmates from the Orange County Correctional Institute, and he would bring them to volunteer at Habitat. I especially enjoyed working alongside them, and took the opportunity to hear some of their stories and dreams. They were very moving, and I loved the fact that no one else on the job site but me knew that they were prisoners. That gave them the freedom to just be viewed and treated as normal people who were giving of their time to help a family in need. We also helped several people coming out of Trosa or out of homelessness achieve their goals of stability and build a home for themselves and their families. In addition, having had several nieces and a nephew who made very bad decisions as young people, I am acutely aware of how easily even a highly educated person from an “upstanding” family can slide into dangerous lifestyle choices. We talked one niece into coming to Trosa, but she was not quite ready to make the commitment to change at the time. Fortunately, she later managed to get on a healthy track and counts each day of sobriety as a blessing. The other two were also able to get the counseling they needed and are doing well, but their outcomes could easily have been totally different had it not been for solid family support and determination. It grieves me to think of how different the outcomes are for so many people who are already dealing with issues of poverty and broken families.

So, thank you for teaching this class and for sharing your moving story. I will do my best not to miss any of the classes. I am especially looking forward to learning more about Children’s Place, as I have heard about that organization for several years.

GM and hope all is well. I am taking this course because I have a cousin who was incarcerated for murdering an ex-husband. Secondly, an in law who was very intelligent, passed the Texas bar.... while serving time. (Drugs) Got out and became VP of a company. Later, he passed the Virginia bar, and is a Delegate in the Portsmouth Virginia area. (Last weekend I attended a swearing -in ceremony at the Richmond Virginia Capitol. Thirdly, a gentleman in my Sunday school class had been incarcerated for 20 plus years for rape. (And guess who he raped...a judge's daughter)

The reason I signed up for this course was to try to understand why we have such problems with these three topical areas- in other words to review how did we get to where we are. I am also interested in learning more about the inter- relationship between the three topics. In addition to better understanding the challenges it would be good to identify some solutions of how we can better address these populations

signed up for this class in hopes of learning how best to build a plan to help my nephew Christopher, who has been addicted to drugs since his early teens and been part of the criminal justice system on and off since he was 15. He is now 35 and lives in Louisiana, where he has been in and out of multiple jails and prisons. He is a non-violent offender and is either arrested for a parole violation, failing to appear, drug paraphernalia, or stealing to get money for drugs. However, since he's always released on probation, he supposedly cannot leave the state which is problematic for us and him.

We've had him in multiple drug programs but the longest he lasted was 6 months and that was when he was 15. Although at least in prison/jail he's off the streets, my sister and I want to build a more sustainable solution that puts him in a structured environment for at least two years, provides mental health counseling, and helps him learn "life skills" and impulse control.

As background, Christopher was diagnosed with ADHD as a child and has always had problems with impulse control. Adding to his challenges, he was sexually abused by his coach when he was 9 yrs old for a period of almost a year. By age 11 he had begun using drugs and getting into trouble. He has never dealt with his

trauma and although I have offered to pay for his therapy, he is reluctant to talk to a professional. Over the last few years, after what I think, was really bad meth, he has begun to believe he is being gang stalked (i.e. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/11/health/gang-stalking-targeted-individuals.html>) As he is paranoid about almost everyone's motives, he doesn't feel safe telling a therapist about his fears as he's afraid he'll be locked him up in a mental facility. That said, because he is very smart and can be charming, when he's "on the straight and narrow", he has been able to get himself a job, gain admission into an Oxford halfway house, go to church, and regularly attend his AA/NA meetings. Unfortunately, this never lasts long.

Whether in jail or out, we'd like to become his guardians so we can place him into a program and make his stay there long enough to get the help he needs. I'm not sure if this is feasible so in lieu I've looked for long term programs that would help with some of his underlying mental health issues vs. just the drug addiction but am having a hard time figuring out how to get him out of LA and where to send him with the court's blessing.

Hopefully this course will help and since you mentioned your willingness to meet one on one, I'd be grateful for any guidance you might provide.

"Why did I register for the class titled Addicted, Homeless, or Incarcerated?"

For me it is research for a "legacy project" I am in the early stages of planning. In attempting to find a "successful" rehab program for our heroin addicted granddaughter (now clean for five years) I discovered a model which, as far as I can ascertain, is found only in one place -- which happens to be San Patrignano, Italy. And while San Pat is similar to Delancey Street in San Francisco, and TROSA here in NC, it is also significantly different. I have done a lot of research about San Pat; and it is my goal to recreate this model in this country. [If you're interested, this short video gives a good overview -- in English! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkale_ji6p4]

You are so well organized! Class 1 was so interesting and varied. A good mix of info for all.

We hope this will make advocates of many of the class members and maybe even get some involved with OCC or with changing laws in Raleigh

I registered for the class primarily because I have an interest in causes/solutions to homelessness which I think is a vastly misunderstood problem. That being said, the syllabus looks great and the list of speakers is very impressive.

I have one comment about the first class. I felt

That in telling your story, you glossed over what happened after you discovered the accounting mistake. In other words, what enabled you to then take money you were not entitled to? You did say ambition, and a wish to grow your business but I'm more interested in the actual thinking that occurred as it must have been very out of character for you to have done something like that. I think the woman at the end of the first class who asked about your addictions was trying to get at this. I imagine it was very hard for you and your family to come to terms with all of this, especially your ability to justify your crime to yourself.

Thanks so much for doing this class. I think it's very unusual for OLLI

To have a class like this. Kudos to you.

I am curious as to what help is available for ex-cons - to keep them out of prison in the future/and also am very disturbed by all the gun violence in Durham. I am a nurse at Duke and take care of these patients. Possibly get info on how to deal with this and decrease the violence. Would education/ jobs at an early age decrease guns/ gangs??? Thanks - Am looking forward to this class

Hi Mark, So sorry I had to miss your first class but it sounds like it went great. I registered for this class to learn more from you about our prison systems and related programs.

I'm responding to your question regarding why I registered for this class.

I moved to downtown Durham about a year ago from another state. Living downtown I am confronted with the issues of addiction and homelessness on a daily basis. Each time I walk downtown I am asked for money, sometimes food. Usually these are non-confrontational, though not always. Often I recognize the same people wandering the streets with the same story about needing bus fare, or needing money before they start a new job, etc.

I'd like to find out more about this cycle of addiction, incarceration and homelessness and I'd like to get a clearer picture of the scope of these problems in my new city/state. I'd also like to see how/where I might be able to help.

The description of this class in the course catalog caught my attention. As I read the description I was hoping that the class would be a serious presentation that would really explore these topics. Several years ago I read "Just Mercy" and found it to be one of the most insightful though disturbing books I'd ever read. When I saw that that was the book recommended as background for the course I felt confident that this class would present the kind of information I was looking for. After hearing the presentation last week, and your plans for future speakers, the class has already exceeded my expectations.

My education and enlightenment from working with you and our collaborators. The continued mistreatment of these groups with an emphasis on punishment and not rehabilitation/therapy. The discrimination against people of color and the poor, and the importance for each of us to advocate for changes in our country to offset these longstanding wrongs. I want to learn more about these topics and the actions I can take

As to your request about why I enrolled: (1) I heard you speak two times and was very impressed; (2) Richard and Tom's involvement with you is a further endorsement, since I know them both and value their opinions; and (3) I realize I've lived my life in a very protected bubble and should learn more about the lives of

people not so fortunate and, perhaps, find small ways I could help effect change.
See you Wednesday

The primary reason I'm taking the class is that I've just joined a Faith Team to support a returned citizen. I wanted to have a broader context for my participation on the Team and thought this would help.

Also I serve as Guardian ad Litem, and in one of my cases the father was often in jail and later incarcerated for murder. Again I wanted to understand the situation better, the causes leading up to his incarceration and the effect on the child.

I'll look forward to joining you all next week.

I registered for this class because:

My former husband, due to a history of depression and unwise financial decisions, is now homeless. He has held positions of leadership with the federal government and education sectors, in the U.S. and abroad.

I wish to be more educated about the wide range of services available to individuals who suffer from addictions, incarceration or homelessness. I live in a world of white privilege.

Thank you for offering this course.

First I have a son currently incarcerated for multiple dwi's and secondly I read a book(the new Jim Crow) about the incarcerations levels among black males which was mind blowing! Also curious about how we as a society maybe failing to prepare our young men for responsible adulthood, etc.

Thank you for developing and teaching this class. I especially appreciate your courage and honesty describing your conviction and incarceration. I am sure few, if any, people in the class have experienced imprisonment and it is really valuable to hear a firsthand description of what it's like. I would welcome hearing more from you about life on the inside, including living arrangements, education and

activities, relations with other prisoners, supervision and discipline, etc. The information you provided on transitioning to the outside world and the limited resources available to assist inmates at this stage was particularly useful.

I enrolled in your class because I have a general public policy interest in all the topics in the course heading. I spent most of my career with the NC Attorney General's Office in consumer protection and also handled criminal appellate cases. In my view, much of the sentencing was excessive (although in compliance with sentencing statutes). I also agree with your observation that there were many otherwise decent people who had "one bad day" and did something wrong due to being inebriated or on drugs, with the wrong people, around weapons, or just were in the wrong place at the wrong time and reacted badly.

I am also interested in the interplay between mental health and addiction and the prison system. While we have largely abandoned mental health institutionalization, the transition to community-based mental health care has fallen way short of needs. It seems that the jails are becoming the de facto mental health and substance abuse treatment facilities. What treatment, if any, do correctional institutions provide?

I served a partial term in the NC General Assembly by appointment (2016-17). Despite the relative dysfunction of our political system, it does seem that there are opportunities for bipartisan action on issues like sentencing reform and expungement of criminal records. I would be interested on your views on what can be done to reduce incarceration and the obstacles to felons becoming productive members of the community. Great course, keep up the good work!

YO
YOUR CLASS WAS GREAT! I might have to come again. Of course I am not surprised. I was interested in you and the speakers (who were terrific) but I was also interested in the students -- who seemed to be totally engaged. There were some people I recognized as mental health professionals, and a couple others, like me, who have had family experiences that were only too similar. What I liked a lot about the presentations were the hopefulness that you all brought, without denying the huge mountains of need and difficulty.

Congratulations to you for pulling this together! Would you consider doing something in the fall? I know Chris wants to do the Mental Health First Aid workshop in the spring, as a workshop perhaps? But maybe we could also do it again in the fall and list it in the catalog.

Onward and upward. Sorry to hear about your son's difficulties. We have similar difficulties at our house.

I am the person who came up to you last week after class and asked about support services for people "on the edge."

I apologize for turning what I intended as a generic question into a personal one. I really just wanted to know if there were any organizations that can provide guidance to people who are struggling to make ends meet, avoid falling into homelessness or other unfortunate situations before they get into trouble. We all know someone in that situation, especially given today's employment situation, health care costs, cost of living etc.

I am really enjoying the class and learning about the innovative organizations out there. I hope there are some like the one I mention.
