



ALUMNAE CONTINUING EDUCATION CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS

September 2018 is a special milestone for Alumnae Continuing Education at Northwestern, as that month marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the program. Though continuing education programs for older adults may not be unusual in universities today, they were a novel and pioneering concept in 1968 when this program began.

The idea was born following the great success of an Alumnae event called NU Woman's Day (at first we focused on "women") which began in 1965. NU Woman's Day was an annual day of seminars and lunch featuring Northwestern professors, which was conceived and sponsored by the Associate Alumnae, the name by which The Alumnae of Northwestern was known until the middle 1970s. Following three highly successful NU Woman's Days in the falls of 1965, 1966 and 1967, interest was generated among those in attendance for additional similar educational opportunities. Alumnae members began to discuss how the idea could be expanded. Key to the original planning were three of the board's presidents of that period, Pat Rosberg, Marian Osborne, and Joy Kent, with Pat Rosberg as the lead visionary. It is noteworthy to mention that NU Woman's Day continued until 1997, along with the new continuing education project which it inspired. In 1976, the name was changed to NU Day, as men had already begun taking part, in spite of the day's name. About the same time, the Alumni Office used our seminar model to create their annual spring NU Seminar Day now called A Day at Northwestern, which began in the mid-1970s.

In the spring of 1968, Pat Rosberg and several other women from the Associate Alumnae, met with William Bradford, Associate Dean of Faculties at Northwestern, to present their idea for a series of courses that would showcase the University's outstanding faculty as well as provide a forum for bringing residents from surrounding communities to the campus. From the beginning, the goal was to bring area residents to campus to become more acquainted with the University and its wonderful academic resources. Dean Bradford was enthusiastic about the plan and agreed to help find space for the program.

The Alumnae also had a key "advocate" in Alumni Director, Ray Willemain, who helped see that the appropriate people were informed and accepting of the plan. As the last independent Alumni Director, reporting directly to the university's president, he had a special ability to facilitate the effort. Through Ray, we were "assigned" to his deputy assistant, Charlotte Voigts, who supported us in multiple ways and provided us with our first filing cabinet and storage spaces. (Impressed with the work of our group, she also became a productive board member upon her retirement from the Alumni Office.)

A committee was formed with Pat Rosberg leading, joined by Stephanie White, Barbara (Bobbie) Collins, and Cindy Pinkerton, and planning began. While long-time member Janis Hattis was not a member of the board at that time, her friendship with board members and her familiarity with many of Northwestern's finest professors through her leadership of the current affairs classes at the North Shore Senior Center, made her a valuable resource and contact for the committee. Early classes were held in the Women's Library, adjoining the Guild Lounge in Scott Hall, or occasionally in the living room of John Evans Center. When those venues proved too small, larger courses were held in the School of Music's Lutkin Hall. Norris Center had not yet been built.

Two courses were offered in the fall of 1968, a seminar in literature taught by Marge Crawford and a course that examined the causes of the revolutionary changes occurring in societies around the world taught by Karl de Schweinitz, Gwendolen Carter, James Sheridan, and Frank Safford. The fee per course was \$30, and 146 participants enrolled. Since the program had been designed as a service to the University and the community, a “town and gown” effort, and not as a moneymaking project, the sponsors were pleasantly surprised when first quarter net profits were \$1,994.

Encouraged by this success, the Alumnae scheduled four courses for winter quarter, 1969, two on Tuesdays and two on Thursdays, a pattern that has carried on to the present day. One of the courses offered that winter was titled “The History of Blacks in the United States.” There was also a course on art, with professors James Breckenridge and George Cohen. From the beginning, the program has offered both traditional courses and courses exploring cutting edge research and topics with special current relevance. Faculty from all areas of the University have participated, including all the graduate schools.

While the most prevalent pattern for Continuing Education courses has been four courses in each of the regular academic quarters and two in the summer, other experiments have been tried, most notably on the Chicago downtown campus and on Saturdays, though scheduling and volunteer challenges, along with generally lower participation, have resulted in their discontinuation. Some of these details are given in the table which ends this report.

Some professors who have given classes recently for Alumnae Continuing Education were also part of the program in earlier years. Henry Binford, history, gave his first course for the program in 1976; Carl Petry, history, in 1977; Ken Seeskin, philosophy, in 1977; Dan Garrison, classics, in 1979; Ken Janda, political science, in 1980; and Peter Hayes, history, in 1985.

Although Alumnae Continuing Education has never been publicly advertised, enrollment has continued to grow, largely by word of mouth. Even after overcrowded parking lots necessitated a University decision to disallow parking for our students on campus in the early 1990s, enrollments soon recovered. Today over three thousand registrations are processed for the fourteen courses offered each year. Over the years, we have had many inquiries from alumni groups at other universities contemplating the formation of a continuing education project similar to ours. To my knowledge none has been successful, or at least nowhere near the scope of The Alumnae Continuing Education program at NU. It helps that so many of our alumnae continue to reside nearby.

Net profits from the program go exclusively to support Northwestern University in many diverse ways. Since 1968, these profits have exceeded \$6 million dollars. Yet in the 1970s when the University approached the board to discuss the desirability of taking over management of the program, their resulting calculations determined that without the strong volunteer presence, the program likely would not break even.

Needless to say, volunteer hours spent on Alumnae Continuing Education are enormous. A large number of Alumnae Board members are active on the Continuing Education planning committee, and virtually all members either proctor or coordinate courses annually. Alumnae volunteers manage all aspects of the program, from course creation through all details of administration. In the process, they struggle with the challenging logistics of finding classrooms, arranging busing, preparing and mailing the brochures, registering the thousands of students, and scheduling (and sometimes re-scheduling) the professors, including meeting their A/V and other technical needs. Some Board members have even learned the finer points of operating recalcitrant microphones and A/V equipment.

From the beginning, the program has set a goal of striving for excellence by selecting top University professors and working with them to create innovative and substantive courses, many on a par with graduate-level courses. Each course is carefully evaluated at its conclusion, and recommendations from students are seriously considered. The excellence of the program has been acknowledged by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, which twice has given it their Exceptional Achievement Award.

While our professors appreciate not having to give tests or grade papers, most say that their greatest pleasure in teaching Continuing Education courses lies in the well-educated, well-informed, curious, and attentive students who attend. A recent survey confirmed that the great majority of students have undergraduate college degrees and a surprising fifty-two percent hold graduate or professional degrees. Though many are retired, their curiosity and desire to learn are undiminished.

This year we are planning several special events to celebrate our 50th anniversary. As a kickoff, Continuing Education will sponsor a morning lecture on September 27 by Sergio Rebelo, an international finance expert from the Kellogg School of Management.

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