Dear All,

As we begin a new semester, I have such a sense of both celebration and possibility for the learning community we are creating together. Each and every one of you—whether you are involved in a committee, teach a class or are an active class participant—are part of building the Vassar College LLI. A big thanks to all who have been making the first two semesters such a great success. Below is a quick run-down of the fall semester of 2018’s accomplishments and what’s ahead in the new semester.

• 225 LLI members
• 26 Friday-courses on campus
• 4 additional non-Friday courses off the Vassar campus
• Consistently positive presenter reviews in course evaluations
• Growing number of active committee members supporting every aspect of the LLI
• Growing traffic in the Hospitality Room
• A fabulous semester-end party
• Our first special event, a literary reading, hosted in collaboration with “Read650”, Marist College’s Center for Lifetime Study and the Bard College LLI

Looking ahead to 2019, plans for the spring semester are in full swing. For those of you eagerly awaiting new learning, a “working list” of course titles are posted on the website. We are actively recruiting class managers for all these courses, which is a great opportunity to combine your own course participation with service to the LLI. Contact Joanna Valeo, (joannevaleo@gmail.com) chair of Class Managers Committee, if you want to pitch in.

Similarly, the Special Events Committees is looking for additional members. Building upon the first special event with Read650, we have plans in the works for three exciting happenings in the coming year. Diana Salsberg and the Special Events Committee are planning a visit to the Magazzino Italian Art museum (Cold Spring), a “Fusion Dance” workshop, and a showing of the documentary “Song of Life,” about how the mayor and the priest of a Greek Island saved its entire Jewish community during WWII. Special thanks are due here to Diana Salsberg, chair the Special Events Committee for her hard work.

Finally, we will maintain the current membership level through the end of the spring semester. At that time the Council will evaluate whether or not to grow and accept new members for the following year. Our goal is to find that sweet spot at the intersection of diverse course offerings while creating a community that is big enough to be inclusive and small enough to be personal. Participation in committees is key to both building our capacity and our community. To that end, you will find a list of committee chairs below. Please reach out to me directly (grunfeld@vassar.edu) if you want to get involved and aren’t exactly sure where or how.

I look forward to welcoming you back at the opening of our spring semester.

Mihai

The Hospitality Room is a core component of the LLI. Located on the second floor of Kenyon Hall in the Club Room, it is the social hub of our community. If you haven’t already stopped by for coffee or tea and snacks between classes or joined a table with your brown bag lunch, plan to do so soon! There is a suggested donation of $1 for the hot drinks and a sign-up sheet if you are inspired to bring some goodies to share. A special shout out to Theresa Catapane and her crew and all of you who have contributed to making the Hospitality Room a success. Theresa’s contact info is tcatapane@yahoo.com if you want to join in.
Sampling of Fall 2018 courses

Gentle Walks in the Hudson Valley

For the Gentle Walks in the Hudson Valley class, Presenters David Bloom and Mark Boujikian set the following goals: fresh air, exercise, cultural enrichment and community building. Fortunately, the weather cooperated and on four beautiful Thursdays, members of the class experienced all of this and also had an opportunity to take some great pictures of the fall foliage. Programs during and after our walks included a tour of the Harney Tea Company Factory in Millerton, The Women’s Studio Workshop in Rosendale, The Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill in Hyde Park, and The West Point Foundry Preserve in Cold Spring. Many members expressed the hope that the class will be offered again.

Carolyn Lampack
It’s the Law: A Primer on American Jurisprudence

After the last of four sessions of It’s the Law, several of us could be heard admitting with a smile, “I thought this was going to be pretty dry when I signed up.” Mickey Steiman’s presentations are anything but. This primer brings us through the American legal system, from local Family Court workings to the Supreme Court’s function. Along the way, we explore the historical roots of the legal process, some surprising facts about the Grand Jury structure, and the contradictions within the term “Law and Order.” Prof. Steiman handily fields the many questions that emerge in each session, often using timely local and national events to illustrate otherwise complex legal issues. This very satisfying overview of our multilayered legal system has left this participant wishing she had gone to law school after all.

Anne Kane

Magic for Grandparents

I’ve never been interested in magic. While growing up I never had the same fascination with magicians that many other kids had. All of that changed when my husband mentioned to me that he wanted to sign up for the magic class but there were two other classes that he also wanted to take during the same time slot. He wondered if I would take the magic class and teach him what I learned. There wasn’t a class being offered during that time that I was interested in, but I still wasn’t sure. My hesitation, aside from my lack of interest in the subject, was my aversion to being the center of attention, and as we know, magicians are performers. I finally decided it would be good to step out of my comfort zone, so I signed up for the class. I was really surprised by how much I enjoyed it. In fact, I didn’t miss a single session. Aside from being an accomplished magician, our instructor, Andy Weintraub, has a quiet and captivating presence...with an abundance of much needed patience. Like a kid, I couldn’t wait to go home and share what I had learned in class.

So, what about my aversion to the spotlight? Well, although I’m not planning on pursuing a career as a magician, I’ve made a late life discovery... I do enjoy performing for familiar audiences!

Amy Bard Yarmosky
The Creative Self

Meditation is central to the experience of the creative self. I had not looked at meditation that way. I saw it as a way to focus on my inner core and to not fall apart. What I learned and am working at absorbing is how meditation allows me to look inward and then outward with what I have found within. It is somewhat like discovering a buried treasure. It is a double dip for me as one thing I always thought about doing with my life was to be an archeologist or paleontologist. I am not. The creative self brought me there again. I discovered the openness of my classmates. All of us were total strangers but in a short time we were sharing deeply held feelings about the self and entering into a dynamic experience. Striking! I learned how thoughtful and sensitive my mates were. It was very different from my initial sense of meditation. I learned how people think through challenges differently and arrive at awesome responses. Mediation enhances the creative self. I have learned a lot. Thanks, Lois, for your gentle guidance.

Ed Shaughnessy
Music as Energy

Music as Energy was a delight! It was a perfect way to spend a Friday morning at Vassar!

Carmen James-Lawrence
Chinese Tea Art

Xiadong Smith’s generous instruction provided a multi-sensory immersion in Chinese tea art. Each week, she introduced a different type of tea, highlighting its botanical qualities, regional origin, processing, and health benefits, along with hands-on practice with the appropriate brewing and serving implements. The tradition and etiquette of tea culture were conveyed through short videos and introduction to some of the Chinese characters, language, and poetry used to describe tea. The course culminated with a complete tea ceremony - a meditative, communal, indelible experience.  

Cary Phillips Auerbach

Special Event: Read 650

Sanders Auditorium at Vassar College was filled to capacity on Sunday, October 28 as Read650 staged a unique and captivating event. Read650 celebrates authors who tell stories limited to 650 words. This series of readings was entitled “Lessons Learned, True Stories of Work, Warmth and Wonder”. Thirteen published authors shared deeply personal stories of their life lessons that ran the gamut of emotions from humorous to anger to heartbreaking and more. While personal in nature, each reading touched a chord that was easily relatable to the audience, from fighting racial prejudice to growing up with a workaholic dad. Edward McCann, the Founder/Editor of Read650 ended the program with an exceptionally poignant story about a member of his family. A very appreciative audience left both enlightened and perhaps with thoughts of a lesson learned in their own lives.

A wine and cheese reception followed which gave audience members the opportunity to mingle with the readers from the program and perhaps pick up some tips as to how to write their own story.

The event was presented with support from the Vassar Lifelong Learning Institute, Bard Lifetime Learning Institute and the Marist Center for Lifetime Study.

We owe our thanks to Diana Salsberg for making this event the success that it was, and to the Vassar College students who assisted her — Beungbeom Hong, Meeraol Zaheer, Jonan Klang, and Amalia Wu.

For more information on Read650 and future reading events, please visit READ650.com. You do not have to be a published author to submit a story for consideration.

Glenn Conciatori
We are fortunate at VCLLI to have so many talented and passionate instructors. We asked two of our presenters to continue the conversation beyond the classroom.

Meet the Presenters: a Conversation with Sybil DelGaudio and Lou Trapani
(Understanding Movies: the Language of Film and Thirty Years of Theater)

- What experiences sparked your love of film/theater?

**Sybil:** As an only child, I spent lots of time watching TV, and one of my favorite shows was “Million Dollar Movie.” They’d show the same film three times a day for an entire week, which meant you could see King Kong 21 times! I used to hope I’d catch some lengthy sickness—like chicken pox—so that I could stay home the whole week and learn all the dialogue in whatever film was running. My mother was also a movie lover, so I think her interest/excitement was probably passed along to me.

**Lou:** Like Sybil I spent a lot of time as a child watching TV because I WAS sickly. The era 1952 to 1964 is marked by long stretches on the sofa in either the living room in Brooklyn (or what we called the TV room in Northport) watching Million Dollar Movie, The Beacon Wax Playhouse, Warner Brothers Theatre, Saturday Night at the Movies, Shock Theatre, Picture for a Sunday Afternoon, The Early Show, The Late Show, and The Late Late Show, all of which were dedicated to showing films (early television was dominated by movies because it filled time cheaply).

*Million Dollar Movie,* when I was about eight, broadcast *Les Miserables* with Charles Laughton and Frederic March the nearly two dozen times Sybil recounts and I watched it every time. At the end of the film, Laughton as Javert pours out his heart to Valjean after apprehending him. He says that his dogged pursuit is not his doing: “It’s not me. It’s the law, see. It’s the law.” He then allows Valjean to say goodbye to his daughter Cosette and, while Valjean is so doing, he looks up to heaven with tears in his eyes and decides to end his life. He quickly exits the scene, shouts are heard, and the next shot is his hat and cane swirling in the Seine.

I wept every time but it was only at the twelfth or so viewing that I realized my tears had been manipulated by a master actor in the hands of a master director (underscored by a master composer and shot by a master cinematographer). At that viewing, I decided that’s what I wanted to do: move people to tears (later on, when watching Laurel and Hardy films over and over, I decided I wanted to move people to laughter too).

- How has your relationship with your art form changed through your life?

**Sybil:** I was teaching high school English in the late sixties, and we were always looking for ways to engage students beyond the usual curriculum, so I thought it might be interesting to offer a film class. Teaching film in high school was a challenge back then. With no VCRs or VHS yet available, it meant going back and forth to the library to borrow short, 16mm films that could be shown but also leave room for discussion in a 45-minute period. I was convinced that looking at film critically should not be a passive viewing experience but should engage the viewer through an understanding of how films communicate.

That was the beginning of a more serious, academic approach to film study, which took me to grad school and teaching at Hofstra University as well as to a variety of research interests that included animation, documentary and feminist film theory. So if we continue to follow the developing through-line, the next step was a documentary series on independent women animators, which I directed, and my partner, Patty Wineapple, produced. *Animated Women* was funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and gave us both the doc-maker credentials to get funding for the next project, *Independent Spirits,* a one-hour film on the lives and work of animation artists, John and Faith Hubley.

And now, teaching at Vassar LLI, returns me to what I love most: sharing my passion for film with others. Thus the through-line circles back to where it all essentially began…
Lou: My relationship with acting for the stage has constantly changed and now, after 56 years of appearing in plays, I concentrate on listening to what the other actors are saying like I’m hearing it for the first time. I try to feel the room and the clothes I’m in like they’re real and they’re mine. I try to experience the furniture and props like they’re real and they have a function. I breathe the air on stage like it’s the air in real life so I can respond to what I hear and feel naturally. I don’t think about lines, I don’t think about what’s going to happen, I don’t think about the arc of the play – I just try to be “in the moment.”

My relationship with directing for the stage has also changed and now, after having directed well over 100 plays, I concentrate on simplicity – I eschew fancy sets and costumes and complicated lighting and sound and concentrate on the spoken word and the intimacy created by actors portraying real people in real situations. I am really an acting coach now and not a director.

- Can or should most plays be made into films? What are some of the most successful film versions of plays? What are some of the least successful? Why?

Sybil: Don’t know about “can” or “should,” but my own opinion is that most great plays are “great,” in part, because their writers have an acute understanding of the medium for which they are writing. Thus, they work on a stage, and both the potential of that stage as well as its restrictions, are considered in the writing. Acknowledging that the term “great” is entirely subjective, I can’t really think of a “great” play that’s been made into a “great” film. If I had to choose one that comes the closest for me, I guess it would be Olivier’s version of Shakespeare’s Henry V. One of the least successful? I’ll stick with Olivier and say his film version of Hamlet. Hard to make those soliloquies work well on screen.

Lou: There’s no rule except somebody’s desire to film a play. Some really great films are based on plays: Summer and Smoke, Suddenly Last Summer, A Streetcar Named Desire, A Few Good Men, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, twelve different versions of Hamlet, a couple of really good A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and the list goes on and on and on. Let’s remember that the rules of geography and economy are in play here, i.e. more people can be reached by a film and more people can afford to attend a film. Some of my favorite plays into films are: Julie Taymor’s Titus Andronicus, Ethan Hawkes’ Hamlet, A Few Good Men, and there are many, many others. They preserve the script AND engage as cinema. Some of my least favorite plays into films are stage musicals that have made it to the big screen: Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, Finnan’s Rainbow, and some other American musicals really suffer on film. I think it’s because the synergy of live people watching live people is totally lost.

— Do you enjoy both film and theatre?

Sybil: I love both film and theater and try to get to as many plays as I can. Sometimes, the theatrical experience, though different from the film experience, can be even more intense—such as when I saw Come From Away, which I saw early, knew nothing about, and was totally and surprisingly uplifted by. It was a visceral as well as an emotional response.

Lou: I enjoy both film and theatre but I have only been able to regularly attend films (and buy them and rent them) because that’s what I can afford. I have primarily acted and directed and produced on the stage (a few journeys into TV) so that’s what I know and, therefore, that’s what I like. I’ve written scripts for film and TV but they have never been realized.

— What does film do better than theatre, and what do plays do better than film?

Sybil: We can accept a suggestion of reality in theater, but in film, that’s not the case. If a scene takes place under the Brooklyn Bridge in theater, it can be staged with projections or even some sort of stylized set construction. If a similar scene takes place in film, it’d better be shot under the Brooklyn Bridge! It strikes me that Lou would have a more substantial answer to this question!

Lou: Film is sweeping and all encompassing. Look at the first Cinemascope film (and the best): The Robe. Shots that are wide AND deep, thousands of people on camera, a grand and rousing score, spectacle and color AND Richard Burton. What does it lack? It’s not alive and breathing and right there in the moment. That’s the theatre’s greatest contribution to art: it’s right there and performed by living people.
in front of living people. The synergy of the bodies doing AND watching is what makes the theatre so compelling.

— What special characteristics do VC LLI students bring to a class? *(Is there an interesting contrast with your college students?)*

**Sybil:** VC LLI students are among my all-time favorite students to teach! They want to be there, they seem to enjoy participation and they aren’t afraid to express opinions. Also, I can make a popular culture reference to someone or something from twenty or more years ago, and they know what I’m talking about! I don’t have to go into a deep depression because nobody knows who Marlene Dietrich was.

**Lou:** Vassar College students, in my limited experience, are engaged and hip and vocal. They read what is assigned, many of them have experience viewing theatre (and films), and they’re not afraid to speak up. Other classes I have taught have not been so pleasurable. In fact, most of the time I have taught, I have felt like a baby sitter or a performing monkey. Not so with the Vassar LLI!

Thanks to Susan Moore for contributing questions.
**Vassar LLI Spring 2019**

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Please see the VCLLI website for course descriptions and locations.
An Appreciation of VCLLI

I recently retired from IBM in late June after 38 years of service. During my varied work experiences as an engineer and program manager, I've always been very analytical in my thought processes. This was necessary to build a successful career, however it left me wanting, as I never had enough opportunities to explore and further develop my "right brain".

In preparation for an eventual retirement, I signed up for the Marist College Center for Lifetime Studies on the recommendation of several friends in that program. Unfortunately, I've been on the waiting list there since 2014. I was quite pleased however when I received a referral from the CLS in December 2017 about a new program opening up at Vassar. Of course, I applied immediately and was fortunate to be accepted in the first group.

My classes were all very interesting, quite varied, and provided me with some of the enrichment opportunities I was looking for. These classes included: "Evidence of an Afterlife", "Acupuncture: A 5000-Year-Old Healing Art", "Here's Looking at You, Kid: Film & Politics", and "Exploring Science at Vassar College: 7 Lectures by VC Professors" in the Spring semester. Fall semester classes included: "The Photo Series", "It's the Law", "Magic for Grandparents", and "Experience the Hudson Valley Healing Center". All these classes were very enjoyable, with great instructors and friendly and interesting fellow students.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this program, to learn new things and to meet new people. I also enjoy the overall college environment, including just walking around the scenic and historic campus or having lunch in the local commons hall.

Thanks again and sincerest regards,

John Wargo

Important Dates, Announcements

January 31: Finalized course list on website
February 7–March 1: Course registration
March 17–March 25: Add/Drop period
March 15: Orientation for presenters
Class Dates: March 22, March 29, April 5, April 12, April 26, May 3, May 10

No class April 19 (Passover/Good Friday)

May 17—Last class, annual meeting & cocktail party

The Vassar College shuttle will, once again, provide transportation for the spring semester. The shuttle will ferry students to and from the South Parking Lot each Friday during classes. For those who prefer to walk, additional parking can be found in the North Parking Lot and on Collegeview and Raymond Avenues. (Note: Please do not park in the lot across from the nursery school or on the grounds behind Kenyon.)
With appreciation for our Fall 2018 Presenters & Producers:

Presenters


Producers

David Bloom - Barbara Durniak - Elisa Gwilliam - Lucy Johnson - Kathy Kurosman - John Nelson,

Executive Council: Mihai Grunfeld (Chair), Lucy Johnson, Carlie Graves, Joanne Valeo, Larry Miller LLI

A special thanks to newsletter contributors (see article by-lines). Photo credits: Amy Bard Yarmosky, David Bloom, Joette Kane, Carolyn Lampack, Cary Phillips Auerbach, Ed Shaughnessy, Carole Wolf

We welcome contributions (and suggestions) from the LLI community.

Best, Cary Auerbach and Michael Yarmosky