



**OLLI**  
at American University

Curiosity Never Retires

## **STUDY GROUP LEADER MANUAL**



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# Osher Lifelong Learning Institute: Study Group Leader Manual

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## **Preface**

We are delighted that you are leading a study group at OLLI and hope this manual will serve as a useful resource.

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at American University began as the Institute for Learning in Retirement in 1982. OLLI remains dedicated to the proposition that learning is a lifelong process. We offer an exciting program of study groups for intellectually active people who wish to pursue learning within an inquisitive community, as well as lecture series on Fridays during the Fall and Spring semesters, and on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings during January and June.

Consult the OLLI website: [www.lli-dc.org](http://www.lli-dc.org)

## **Thanks**

We are indebted to the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis (BOLLI) as well as the Curriculum Committee of the OLLI at Furman University. We also thank the Institute for Retired Professionals at the New School University (formerly the New School for Social Research) which has done much of the pioneering research in this field. Thank you also to the many OLLI at AU members who have worked to plan and hold the SGL orientations and have also worked on this manual.

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## A. OVERVIEW

Welcome! This guide is designed to help give participants the confidence and skills to become effective Study Group Leaders, whether you're new to OLLI or a past/current Study Group Leader (SGL).

**STUDY GROUP LEADERSHIP  
IS ABOUT THE STUDY  
GROUP, NOT THE STUDY  
GROUP LEADER**

**--SUSAN WILLENS**

### Objectives

- ❖ Help SGLs “hit the ground running” by demonstrating group management skills and instilling confidence;
- ❖ Assist past and current SGLs to become even more effective; and
- ❖ Familiarize SGLs with OLLI at American University



## B. PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

OLLI is committed to collaborative peer learning in which members and SGLs work together to share their knowledge and experience. Some principles to guide you further:

- ❖ Recognize that all OLLI members bring a significant body of knowledge and experience.
- ❖ Encourage the sharing of knowledge.
- ❖ Respect differing beliefs, values, and opinions.
- ❖ Focus on the strengths learners bring to the classroom, not just gaps in their knowledge.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for dialogue within the group.
- ❖ Add suspense – yes, you need to give an overview, but keep some interesting points until the time is right.
- ❖ Remember that you, the SGL, do not need to have all the answers. Participants can be resources to you and to each other.
- ❖ Be aware of different learning styles and consider using auditory, visual, and participatory teaching methods.
- ❖ Consider inspiring class members by getting them involved emotionally – tap on memories and add real-life stories.
- ❖ Ask class members for feedback – it’s motivating to know that your opinion contributes to the course.
- ❖ Many adults prefer teaching methods other than a formal lecture.
- ❖ Stay positive and focused.

**THE ENTIRE PROCESS CAN BE DESCRIBED AS “THINKING ALOUD TOGETHER”**

**--RICHARD SCHAEFFERS**

## C. STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL PROCESS

The curriculum committee draws Study Group Leaders from within the OLLI membership, from American University faculty, and from the Washington, DC community. Leaders are individuals with relevant expertise who wish to share their knowledge with members, and in turn, also learn in the process.

### The proposal process:

- ❖ An online proposal form is submitted via the OLLI website. All potential Study Group Leaders, whether previous or new, are asked to submit a proposal so that we have all their pertinent course information. **Please note that planning for each academic session happens far in advance, so proposals need to be submitted very early (see deadlines below).**
- ❖ A copy of the proposal is sent to the OLLI office and the person who submitted it.
- ❖ A member of the curriculum committee who oversees that particular area of the curriculum reaches out to the person to speak with them about their course, offer support if needed, and explain the next part of the process. Curriculum committee members may ask SGLs if they can stop by their class at some point.
- ❖ The curriculum committee meets after the proposal submission deadline (see below) to approve the final list of courses to be recommended to the Board.
- ❖ The Board votes and gives the final approval on courses.
- ❖ The OLLI office notifies Study Group Leaders about their course status for that session.

#### Proposal submission deadlines:

Spring Semester/February Shorts – End of November

June Minis/July Shorts – Middle of April

Fall semester – Middle of May

## D. OLLI AT AU: CLASSROOM LOGISTICS

- ❖ OLLI members generally address each other by their first names in order to reinforce an atmosphere of peer learning.
- ❖ Nametags and name “tents”: Use yours and encourage study group members to use theirs.

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- ❖ Sessions go for 90 minutes, with no scheduled break during class; however, SGLs may incorporate a break at their discretion.
- ❖ Please note that no food is allowed in OLLI classrooms. Beverages are allowed as long as they are cleaned up when leaving.

## **E. GENERAL LOGISTICS**

### **a. EMERGENCIES**

Call 911 and then inform the OLLI office.

#### **Telephone Numbers:**

OLLI office: 202.895.4860  
AU security number: 202.885.2527  
District 20 Fire House: 202.673.3220

### **b. PARKING**

All those visiting AU, including OLLI, must park in the building's attached parking garage or in a metered spot on the street. A parking stipend check in the amount of \$10 per day that you teach will be available for you to pick up in the OLLI office starting the first day of classes.

### **c. CLASS FOLDER**

There is a folder for each Study Group, which the Study Group Representative (SGR) will bring to each session. The folders are stored in mesh baskets located outside each classroom door in descending order (first class of the day at the top, followed by the second, and then the third at the bottom). There will be an attendance list in each folder.

The lecture series flyer will be in each folder. Each week the SGR will announce the next week's lecture, as well as any other announcements that may be in the folder.

### **d. ATTENDANCE**

Please make sure that the SGR takes attendance or circulates the attendance list at *every* session. There will be an attendance list in your folder. It's important the attendance is taken each time because the office tracks attendance trends for both classes and academic sessions. Also, attendance records helps the office to let more people into an oversubscribed class if there ends up being space. Ask the SGR to contact anyone who has been missing for more than

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two consecutive sessions to discern the reason and let the office know. Please leave the attendance sheet in the folder at the end of each session as well as on the last day of the class.

## e. WITHDRAWALS FROM AND ADMISSIONS TO A STUDY GROUP

SGLs are often approached about letting an additional member into a study group. **Please say no and tell them they must call the office because many study groups have waiting lists. If there is space in your study group, let the office know. Ask the SGR to notify the OLLI office if members withdraw.**

## f. ABSENCES AND INCLEMENT WEATHER

**Absences** - Please notify the OLLI office at 202.895.4860 or [olli@american.edu](mailto:olli@american.edu) if you will be absent or late. You should also email your study group members if there is not enough time for the OLLI office to contact the study group. Or, you may be able to find a study group member who can lead that session. **Please let the office know if you will be missing a session, even if you have already told your study group, so that the staff at the location knows and doesn't need to set up equipment.**

**Inclement Weather** - OLLI follows AU's weather policy. If AU has a delayed opening, OLLI's 9:45 a.m. classes are cancelled and the 11:45 a.m. and 1:45 p.m. classes are held. If AU is closed, OLLI is also closed for the day and all classes are cancelled. OLLI posts a notification of any delay or closure on its website ([olli-dc.org](http://olli-dc.org)) by 6:30 a.m. and sends an e-mail to all SGLs and registrants.

## g. READINGS: BOOKS, COPIED MATERIALS, AND COSTS

OLLI staff will order the books that SGLs designate as required reading in their course descriptions and some copies will be available at Politics & Prose Bookstore at 5015 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008. Course books purchased on Politics & Prose Bookstore can be purchased for a 10% discount. Books can also be purchased elsewhere.

OLLI staff is happy to copy fewer than 30 sheets of paper per class member per study group at no cost to the member. **If more copying is required, we will charge study group members a nominal amount (below) which will be collected by the SGR.** Please give all materials to be copied to Jesse Williams in the OLLI office – you can e-mail him at [jessew@american.edu](mailto:jessew@american.edu) or hand deliver the items. **DO NOT PLACE MATERIALS TO BE COPIED IN CLASS FOLDERS. When possible, we prefer for all copying be submitted prior to the beginning of the semester. Otherwise, please give a week's lead time for copying.** Copies will be delivered to your classroom the day of your class and will be placed either in the basket on the wall next to the door or on one of the tables inside.

<b>Photocopying Charges</b>	
Less than 30 sheets	Free
30 sheets (60 pages if double-sided)	\$5
75 sheets (150 pages if double-sided)	\$10
125 sheets (250 pages if double-sided)	\$15
175 sheets (350 pages if double-sided)	\$20

If you are going to have a large amount of copying, we will send it out at the beginning of the semester and have it copied. Please let us know the approximate amount on your study group proposal form, so we can let participants know of cost in your study group description in the catalog.

## **h. LIBRARY FACILITIES**

You are welcome to use American University's Bender Library on the Main Campus. The circulation desk will have your name on a list, and you will be issued a temporary library card and can take out books during the semester. You are welcome to visit the library. If you have more questions, consult the library at [www.library.american.edu](http://www.library.american.edu) or 202.885.3237.

## **i. CLASSROOM LOCATION**

Occasionally a study group might be located at site outside of OLLI's primary location, but in general, study groups are located at:

### **American University's Spring Valley Building - 4801 Massachusetts Avenue NW**

This is OLLI's primary home, with classrooms on the first floor (Room A) and fifth floor (Rooms 1-6). The OLLI office is located on the fifth floor (Room 501).

## **j. SGL BENEFITS**

SGLs receive a free session of OLLI classes either in the session they are teaching or the (comparable) session directly afterwards. All SGLs are invited to a volunteer appreciation event towards to end of the spring semester.

## **k. STUDY GROUP REPRESENTATIVES (SGR)**

A volunteer "study group representative" is recruited for each study group to: take attendance; make phone calls; read announcements; retrieve/return the class folder to the mesh box

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located outside each classroom; collect photocopying money (if necessary); and act as liaison with the OLLI office. Each study group will have an SGR assigned to help the leader.

## I. FEEDBACK

OLLI SGLs have found mid-semester and end-of-semester feedback useful. We use an online feedback form that we ask all members to complete. Members will receive an email announcing the request for online feedback, and SGRs will make an announcement in class. Members may choose to provide feedback on paper versions of the form available in the OLLI office.

### ❖ **Mid-Semester Feedback (fall and spring semester only)**

Three weeks into the semester the office will ask members for feedback for the study groups they are attending. We suggest that the Study Group Leader explain that he or she would like some feedback on how the semester is going thus far and request that members complete the online feedback form. The feedback received by the office will be forwarded to each SGL for review. We hope SGLs find this early feedback to be useful in gauging how the course is going thus far and in making any necessary changes.

### ❖ **Final Feedback (all sessions)**

The office will email members to ask them to complete the online feedback forms. Again, the feedback received by the office will be forwarded to each SGL for review. The feedback is also viewable by OLLI's curriculum committee members. This final feedback allows SGLs to reflect back on their course and for OLLI to look at the course as a repeat in subsequent sessions.

## F. MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- ❖ Attendance
- ❖ Feedback
- ❖ Class member engagement

## G. PLANNING FOR A STUDY GROUP

### a. SYLLABUS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ❖ The syllabus is a framework or a roadmap of what your group will cover each week and of what the assignments will be for each session.
- ❖ If you choose to have a syllabus, we suggest that you distribute it at the first session—or earlier if you want participants to read the materials for discussion prior to the first

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class—and inform the study group members in advance if you later decide to make changes. You will get a class attendance list with an automated email list so that you can communicate with all participants.

- ❖ Some SGLs also distribute reading lists or bibliographies. The OLLI staff is happy to copy both the syllabus and bibliography. **Please give us materials at least a week in advance.** You can e-mail them to [olli@american.edu](mailto:olli@american.edu) or bring them by the office.

## b. PLANNING & ORGANIZATION TIPS

- ❖ Consider summarizing the course description and syllabus at the first session of the study group to confirm course expectations. Inform the study group members in advance if you later decide to make changes.
- ❖ Consider distributing or emailing study questions before each session to make it more likely that members will focus on assignments.
- ❖ Make special arrangements for those members in your study group who do not use email (e.g., assign class buddies)
- ❖ Be judicious in the amount of materials that you email to members.
- ❖ Begin each week with a summary of what was covered in the previous session.
- ❖ In preparing an agenda for each session, decide which key points you wish to cover. Consider putting the agenda up on the board (or use a PowerPoint or handouts) so that everyone can stay focused on the topic and can participate.
- ❖ Consider using **bold** or **large** fonts to emphasize key points on handouts and in your own talking points so you can glance at your notes without losing your focus on the class.
- ❖ If you plan to show a video clip/movie, look into enabling the closed captioning, if available. Members prefer this so that they can read the captions if they're having difficulty hearing.

## H. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Study groups vary in size and can include small seminars, large lecture course, dramatics, art & music appreciation, discussion groups, and lectures with slides. Select the format and management that will work best with the type of material you wish to share and with your own style.

- ❖ We suggest SGLs go over the OLLI Code of Conduct at the start of their class and emphasize they plan to follow them. *They are posted in each classroom.*

### **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ALL STUDY GROUPS**

**Study Group Leaders set the format for the class.**

**Each person's opinion counts.**

**Everyone participates. No one dominates.**

**It's OK to disagree but not to be disagreeable.**

**Speak positively.**

**Stay focused.**

**Help begin and end on time.**

- ❖ Establish operating procedures, such as members raising their hands before speaking, and that everyone gets an opportunity to speak once before speaking again.
- ❖ Invite participation of all study group members.
- ❖ Encourage members of the group to interact. Remember the goals should be reasoning together, clarifying issues, and enhancing understanding.

### **STRATEGIES TO MANAGE POSSIBLE SCENARIOS**

*Scenario: One or two people are dominating the conversation/discussion.*

- If necessary, set time limits for comments.
- Acknowledge the point the person has made and then say you need to move on:
  - "I'm sorry to interrupt you, but..."
  - "I'm going to have to interrupt and stop you here because others have thoughts to share/we seem to

be straying too far from the topic at hand.

**A GOOD LEADER IS  
INVOLVED, ENGAGED, AND  
OPEN TO QUESTIONS.**

**--WILL BLACKLOW**

**ENTHUSIASM COUNTS!  
HUMOR ALSO COUNTS.**

**--ED GOLDIN**

- "Let's take some comments from people we haven't heard from yet."

- Jump in and ask, "How do the rest of you feel about what he/she is saying?"

**Scenario: A participant appears to be antagonistic or hostile.**

- If the person's attitude is towards you as the SGL, you might try to ignore it at first and move on.
- In any case, you can try to speak to the person after class. Explain what seems to be going on from your point of view.

**Scenario: Several people with differing opinions are arguing about a hot topic.**

- Acknowledge that this issue is controversial/difficult, but it's important to listen and respect peers.
- You might also say, "Let's take a time out for a moment. This is sounded a bit heated and our ground rules require us to avoid being disagreeable. Let's move on here."
- If you choose to do so, you might act as a moderator. Just don't let your own biases show.
- Don't be afraid to take a 5 minute break and then regroup.

**Scenario: A class member is veering off on a tangent with their comment.**

- If necessary, set time limits for comments.
- Jump in and acknowledge what the person is saying, but say you need to get back on the topic.
- You might say, "Your story is very interesting but we need to get back to the subject at hand/move on."

**Scenario: Only a few people are participating in a discussion**

- Try to draw out quiet members *without* putting them "on the spot." You might say:
  - "Are there some ideas we might be missing in this discussion?"

- "Is there anyone who hasn't spoken yet who would like to speak?"
  - "Let's take comments from people we haven't heard from yet."
  - To bring out quiet members, encourage interaction among the study group members, and vary the learning experience, it is sometimes useful to break the class into smaller groups of 4-5 and give them specific issues to discuss.
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**I AM A MAN OF FIXED AND UNBENDING PRINCIPALS, THE FIRST OF WHICH IS TO BE FLEXIBLE AT ALL TIMES.  
--SENATOR EVERETT  
MCKINLEY DIRKSON**

- ❖ Try to handle any enduring difficulty through a private conversation with the member involved. If you encounter an especially difficult situation pertaining to a study group member, please contact the OLLI office.

## **I. PRESENTATION "POINTERS"**

- ❖ **Smile, be natural, and maintain eye contact.**
- ❖ **Introduce yourself at the beginning of the first session.** State your name, a little about your background, how you became interested in your subject, etc. Keep it short. They don't need your life history. Consider giving class members your email address and phone number.
- ❖ **Give study group members an opportunity to introduce themselves in smaller classes.** Again, keep it short, e.g., name, prior occupation, why selecting this course.
- ❖ **Learn names, if possible.** If the study group is large, try to speak to everyone sometime before the end of the class. Encourage everyone to wear name tags and use the name tents.
- ❖ **Treat each person with respect.** The knowledge and talent in the room will amaze you. *Never devalue a person in the study group.*
- ❖ **Be animated and enthusiastic.**
- ❖ **Speak loudly and clearly.** There are also hearing enhancement units ("Hearing Loops") in each classroom for those who need them. They can be very helpful. We

**THERE IS NO "ONE SIZE FITS ALL," BUT THERE IS A SIZE. BE AWARE OF YOUR STYLE.  
--ED GOLDIN**

also have portable microphones. If someone who obviously cannot hear (or see) well is in a remote spot, try to arrange (tactfully) for him or her to move to a better location.

- ❖ **Pause to ask for questions.** If some students are frowning or shaking their heads, say something like, “Some of you seem puzzled. What needs to be clarified?”
- ❖ **Repeat questions so everyone hears it.** Don’t ignore a member who has his or her hand up. Don’t be afraid to ask other participants if they have answers to the questions. If you don’t have the answers right away, make a note and get back to the question at a subsequent session—or ask a participant to do so.
- ❖ **If the answer to a question is unknown, write it down.** Then, once you find out the answer, you can follow up with an e-mail to the class.
- ❖ **Listen carefully to members’ questions or comments.** Show that you are following by nodding, etc. Check whether you really understand by rephrasing the questions.
- ❖ **Repetition may be useful for presenting complex matters.** Relate complex subjects to common ideas or interests. Try to use fresh approaches to clarify the mundane, the obvious, or the conventional.
- ❖ **Review regularly.** At the start of class, briefly review the previous session.
- ❖ **Feel free to ask people to repeat themselves, or to clarify.**
- ❖ **Talk to the class.** Try to avoid reading straight from notes, PowerPoint slides, or from assigned readings except for extremely brief excerpts.
- ❖ **Operation of A/V should be smooth and not take up class time.** Jesse Williams (on the OLLI staff) assists with setup between classes, but if you need help/training

with something you're trying to do in class, he can meet with you one-on-one to help you feel comfortable.

- ❖ **Allow spontaneity.** You want to be organized and ready but maintain some flexibility. It's okay if you didn't get everything done that you had planned; be ready to change plans if an unexpected or provocative idea animates your group.
- ❖ **Allow others to share with you and the group.** Solicit their help. Try to learn more about members' backgrounds, particularly for courses in which members may have some expertise. Informed study group members add a great deal to the group. If someone brings in relevant material, ask if you can take it home to read. If applicable to any of the sessions, use it and credit the person who shared it.
- ❖ **Make the complex simple,** especially at the beginning of the semester. Avoid jargon.
- ❖ **Try to expand on comments and generalize** if a group member tends to relate all issues to him/herself.
- ❖ **Encourage interaction and involvement during the class.**
- ❖ **Have extra material** ready in case you finish early. It's always a good idea to have more material available than you can present in 90 minutes.
- ❖ **Begin and end on time.**
- ❖ **Enjoy yourself!**

## J. DISCUSSIONS

### a. PLANNING FOR ENGAGING DISCUSSIONS

- ❖ One way to promote good discussion and heighten interest is to structure part of the material around surprising, counterintuitive, or controversial issues.
- ❖ Almost any subject area can have a controversial aspect. For example: "Greenwich Village was the

original suburban sprawl,” or “Churchill’s caution extended WWII by a year,” or “A high minimum wage may reduce total income for the working poor.”

- ❖ Try to find the most interesting issues that are relevant and which, of course, have a reasonable rationale on both sides. Then the controversy can be set up through readings or video or class presentations.
- ❖ It is best to introduce controversies that are not closed issues, that is, they should be questions that the SGL does not know “the answer” to. The questions should be issues that well-informed people can disagree on.

## **b. MANAGING DISCUSSIONS**

- ❖ A clear agenda for each discussion (on screen or handout) helps limit digressions. If the discussion strays too far from the immediate subject, you might use the opportunity effectively to refocus the discussion by saying: “That’s an interesting point, but we have to get back to the issues we want to cover today.”
- ❖ Acknowledge an individual’s contribution (e.g., “That’s an interesting idea”), and then follow up with a question that helps the individual share how that idea evolved from the topic.
- ❖ If a question arises to which you do not know the answer, you might say: “I don’t know” and then could suggest: “Would someone like to research that question and present it to the group?”
- ❖ Discourage side conversations by saying, “Please, only one conversation at a time.”
- ❖ Summarize the discussion occasionally, particularly as you move from one point to another.
- ❖ You might write down the names of those who raised their hands and call on them in order.
- ❖ Say, “You have 60 seconds left,” if a participant is taking too long to make a point.
- ❖ End with a brief summary of what has been covered.

## K. ASSIGNING READINGS & FOLLOW-UP

- ❖ Many classes have an assigned text or other reading materials.
- ❖ Alternatively, you can send out an email each week with links to articles for discussion.
- ❖ Make clear what the assignment is for each week or refer to the syllabus.
- ❖ If members feel the text is too difficult, address the concern early on.
- ❖ Ensure that the reading assignments are reasonable in length and that during the next class the highlights of the reading materials will be discussed.
- ❖ “Reasonable”...no more than 25-30 pages per week of dense material, no more than two hours of lighter reading.
- ❖ Consider dividing the reading assignments between “required” and “recommended” categories.

## L. OPTIONAL MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

- ❖ If your study group includes member presentations, present topics to your group at the initial meeting. Allow sufficient time for members to volunteer. SGRs can be helpful in confirming and rescheduling presentations.
- ❖ In some cases, recommend a good book on a subject. The American University Bender Library is available to OLLI members.
- ❖ Try not to over-schedule presentations. *Allow time for discussion* of the presentation and of the readings. In most cases, 10 minutes is ample.
- ❖ Consider scheduling any presentations at the beginning of class to ensure that there is enough time.
- ❖ In assigning presentations, you might suggest a variety of formats (e.g., Q&A, panel discussions, and debates).

**ALWAYS HAVE A BACKUP  
PLAN IF YOU INVITE A  
GUEST....JUST IN CASE  
THE PERSON IS LATE OR  
DOESN'T FIND YOU...OR  
SHOW UP AT ALL.  
--ARLEN BLECHMAN**

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- ❖ You may want to offer your assistance via phone or email.
- ❖ Provide an overview at the beginning of each presentation.
- ❖ Be prepared to clarify the material and to integrate the presentation with other materials the group has been studying.
- ❖ Invite study group members to offer their views. Be open and inviting.

## M. CONTACTS

If you have a question that relates to course content, please e-mail the committee member below in charge of that subject area. If you have a general question, please e-mail [olli@american.edu](mailto:olli@american.edu) or call the office at 202.895.4860.

## CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair: Marianne Soponis - [marianne.soponis@gmail.com](mailto:marianne.soponis@gmail.com)

### 100: Politics, Law & Government

Phil Schwartz  
[phillipschwartz@verizon.net](mailto:phillipschwartz@verizon.net)

### 200: Psychology, Sociology, & Culture

Mark Nadel  
[markvnadel@gmail.com](mailto:markvnadel@gmail.com)

### 300: Economics

John Peterson  
[johnfpete@gmail.com](mailto:johnfpete@gmail.com)

### 400: STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering & Math

Albert Cheh  
[albertmcheh@gmail.com](mailto:albertmcheh@gmail.com)  
Al Taran  
[altaran@mindspring.com](mailto:altaran@mindspring.com)

### 500: Art & Music

**Art:** Lisa Leinberger  
[lkleinberger@gmail.com](mailto:lkleinberger@gmail.com)  
**Music:** Alan Frey  
[afrey@freysheer.com](mailto:afrey@freysheer.com)

### 600: Literature & Language

**Literature:**  
Jeannette Rivera      Cindy Lisec  
[jgrivera@aol.com](mailto:jgrivera@aol.com)      [cohio11@gmail.com](mailto:cohio11@gmail.com)  
**Language:** Sandy Leibowitz  
[sandyleibowitz@gmail.com](mailto:sandyleibowitz@gmail.com)

### 700: History & Geography

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