

## **At Iona College's Learning Program for Retirees, the Students Decide What They Want to Study**

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**Feb. 5, 2010 - [PRLog](#)** -- Here's a unique college senior class. The students create their own course curriculum, not the faculty. There are no homework assignments. No term papers are required. Exams are never given. Grades are not issued. And in this senior class, the students are really all seniors. Many of them are in their 60s, 70s and 80s including a few who are in their early 90s.

Nonetheless, the students all agree that what happens in the classroom, lecture hall and in their interaction with instructors and with each other satisfies their thirst for knowledge and stimulation. Best of all, they are convinced that this special learning program helps keep them engaged and active.

They are members of the Learning in Retirement at Iona College (LIRIC) program. Established in 1994, LIRIC was Westchester's first self-governing, comprehensive program offering not-for-credit courses and social activities for retirees. The student body of 300 members is remarkable. Nearly all of them are college graduates who had successful careers as teachers, attorneys, physicians, nurses and other professionals. They are very active in their communities and volunteer their time for a wide range of charitable causes. They are computer savvy, world travelers, health conscious, stay fit and are independent. They also share a passion for learning which attracted them to LIRIC. (See attached LIRIC member profile).

The LIRIC semester comprises courses and programs that are created by the members as well as some Iona College lectures and special events that reflect their interests. All LIRIC members are encouraged to suggest courses. The curriculum committee designs the programs and arranges for presenters and speakers from among the Iona faculty and from the community at large.

Long-time LIRIC member Marion Shiffer, says: "What makes LIRIC so different from other retiree learning programs is that our members have 100% say in the subjects they would like to pursue." The descriptions of more than 40 courses and workshops in the 2010 catalog for the spring semester— which gets underway on March 1— shows this diversity in member interests. They range from "China in the Cultural Revolution" and "The American Civil War" to the "Art of Calligraphy" and Tai Chi classes.

In addition to art and writing workshops and group discussions on topics of interest such as current events and politics, the members attend Iona College's art events including plays, ballets, and concerts performed by Iona students and take computer courses to stay up to date with technology. They also visit museums, art galleries and other places of interest in the region.

LIRIC members are very much part of the Iona College scene. They can be seen in the audience of young students and faculty members at the Christopher J. Murphy Auditorium in rapt attention listening to a literary lecture series or viewing a classic film; taking a computer course at the Murphy Computer Center; attending a lecture series on "Books That Changed the World" at the Ryan Library and exercising in the athletic center.

The idea that that each generation can learn from each other is evident when younger students attend some of the LIRIC programs and also serve as assistants in the LIRIC classrooms. Dr. Brian Nickerson, Dean of Iona College's School of Arts and Science, said: "Iona College is very fortunate to have these remarkable individuals who bring a wealth of knowledge and life experience to our campus. The interaction between

them and the students who are preparing to become tomorrow's leaders as well as with members of the faculty has made Iona a vital and dynamic learning community that extends across generations and communities throughout the region..”

According to a June 2008 LIRIC letter, “How It Began” by Hilda Meilman, the inspiration for starting the group started with Peggie Cashman of New Rochelle. About 20 years ago, Ms. Cashman, a retired teacher who was pursuing an advanced degree in gerontology studies, became interested in a new trend of retirees returning to the classroom to continue learning and remaining active. She learned about Elderhostel (renamed Exploritas in 2009) a not-for-profit organization founded in 1975 to provide education and travel opportunities for retirees and its initiative, Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLI). She was attracted to the concept of LLI which partnered with colleges and universities to provide educational opportunities for older adults. She decided to establish an Institute in New Rochelle.

But first she needed to determine if there were other like-minded retirees who would be interested in joining. It did not take long for her to find there was strong enthusiasm for the concept. She then approached John G. Driscoll, then president of Iona College to explore if the college would make available space where the members could meet and attend courses. Driscoll liked the idea and the group was allowed to meet on campus in one class room on Friday afternoons when most students left early for the weekend. With Iona's approval, the program which became officially known as LIRIC, was off and running, starting with four courses comprising 15 to 20 students per class.

Seeking new members, the group ran an Open House that “attracted an amazing group of enthusiastic learners with a variety of skills and interests,” Ms. Cashman recalls. Membership grew steadily and so too did the program. Today, LIRIC comprises two eight-week fall and spring semester and two four-week intersessions held in January and July. Courses are held at the campus on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings and at the Elks Lodge in New Rochelle all day on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The annual membership fee of \$190 covers both semesters and the intersessions and entitles members to take as many courses as they wish.

Although residents from New Rochelle continue to represent the largest membership group, LIRIC draws participants from throughout Westchester as well as from the Bronx and Connecticut. The majority of them drive to college.

Ed Richman, LIRIC President, said: “LIRIC is indeed fortunate to be part of the Iona community. We depend on Iona to provide classroom space, administrative support and, most importantly, faculty to teach many of our courses.” He added: “At the same time, LIRIC's presence on campus is a constant reminder to young students that life-long learning actually exists and is flourishing at Iona. This symbiotic relationship has developed over the past 16 years and will undoubtedly continue for many years to come.”

To apply for the spring semester and for more information on LIRIC, visit <http://www.iona.edu> or call (914) 633-2675.

The membership fee, \$160 per person for a full year, or \$90 for the spring and summer only, entitles members to take as many courses as they like. To apply and for more information, call (914) 633-2675 or visit <http://www.iona.edu/liric>.

Founded in 1940 by the Congregation of Edmund Rice Christian Brothers, Iona College is a private, coeducational institution of learning in the tradition of American Catholic higher education. Iona, currently listed in the US News and World Report's annual “America's Best Colleges 2008” and The Princeton

Review's Best Northeastern Colleges 2008 edition, offers undergraduate degrees in liberal arts, science, and business administration, as well as Master of Arts, Master of Science and master of business administration degrees and numerous post-graduate certificate programs.

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