

Ron Miller interview

What's your role at OLLI?

I'll be teaching a course this semester on the writer Wendell Berry ([*The Agrarian Vision of Wendell Berry*](#)), and we'll be talking about why his ideas are important and relevant right now.

His approach to the world is very resonant to Vermonters. You wouldn't find the same kind of resonance in, you know, a place like Chicago where I grew up.

{Berry's} view of the human scale society that we that we ought to be trying to live in I think is very much what we have in Vermont. So, I think we'll have an interesting conversation about that.

Could you talk a little bit about your professional background?

I've been an educator or interested in education most of my adult life. I got a doctorate in American studies and my interest was in the history of educational ideas in the U.S. I got particularly interested in alternative and radical education ideas. So, I spent many years writing about educational alternatives.

I taught for a number of years at Goddard College in the education program where I was working with students who were also interested in, you know, and non-conventional approaches to education.

A few years ago, I moved on. When I moved to Woodstock, VT, I learned that there was an adult learning program there. It wasn't affiliated with the Osher program at Dartmouth, but a lot of the residents in Woodstock, who enjoyed taking Osher courses, didn't want travel to Hanover in the winter. So, they started their own little program and by the time I got there it was flourishing, and they had classes two or three times a year. I started teaching for them and within a couple of years I was running the whole program. For about 10 years, I was involved with it. It's called the Learning Lab. It's very similar to what I think OLLI is doing and, so I'm looking forward to continuing that kind of work.

I'm really an American historian, so when I was teaching in Woodstock, VT, I did courses on the Supreme Court and constitutional law history of political parties, and the history of race

relations. Just looking at issues throughout American history and I hope to do a lot of those here at OLLI well this semester.

What are some of the highlights from your career in alternative education?

I was among a few scholars and activists who were promoting a concept that we called holistic education. And we were building on some of the alternatives that we're already developed, such as Montessori and Waldorf, education, and other humanistic kinds of approaches.

We formed a network of educators around the world, several different parts of the world who wanted to promote these.

I've spoken at conferences in Istanbul, Mexico, and Britain and various parts of the U.S. The movement never grew very large, but it's still going, and there's still some interest in it locally here.

When I was living in Burlington years ago, I was involved in starting the Bellwether school, which is still going after about 28 years in Williston. That's definitely been a highlight.

What are some of your favorite things participating in the OLLI community?

I took one course so far up at the Ethan Allen homestead, and that that was interesting. I'm still very new at this and looking forward to meeting people and experiencing more of what OLLI has to offer.

Is there anything you want to get out of participating in this community?

I think there's intellectual stimulation. Just having wonderful conversations with people about important topics, getting to know people in the community who are thoughtful and curious. Those are the main things.

Do you have any thoughts or advice to share with somebody who is considering participating in the OLLI community?

Adult learning is just a wonderful adventure. You can explore things that you might not have had time or opportunity to learn about before you get to know some interesting people

who share interests with you and have a lot of wonderful conversations. So, it's uh, so definitely, definitely a great thing to do. In this time period of our lives when most of us are retired and don't have the same kind of responsibilities, it's a chance for us to explore.

As a fan of lifelong learning, I look forward to being a participant in OLLI classes with other instructors. Recently I joined a tour in downtown Burlington led by architectural historian Britta Tonn. It was fascinating learning about long-gone features of the city's landscape, and fun to connect with other students. But it was a special treat to reconnect with Britta, who studied with me when I taught at Goddard College almost 20 years ago, and whom I hadn't seen since! She's a wonderful teacher.