The following timeline has been created from a variety of resources over a number of years. Those resources, as available, are noted at the end of each section of the timeline for anyone who wishes to pursue the information in greater detail.

The Founding Years

1990: Dr. Deanna Eversoll, Director of Evening Programs at UNL, presents a non-traditional continuing education proposal to Dr. Simerly, Dean of the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. For the next two years, Dr. Eversoll, along with a 10-person advisory committee made up of community leaders and faculty of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), develops a structure and format for the program to be known as SAGE, an acronym for Sharing Across Generations for Enrichment. The program is unique to UNL.

1992: The Division of Continuing Studies, the Department of Evening Programs and Lifelong Learning Services at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln officially sponsors SAGE with the first class offered in January of 1992. Dr. Eversoll programs all courses, which are taught in the Clifford Hardin Center on East Campus at UNL. Curriculum in the first term consists of 10 courses, each composed of one 90-minute session each week, in six-week segments called “Parts.” The year-end membership for SAGE is 97, of which 53 are full-year members. Full-year membership fees which include an unlimited number of courses are $100. [See attached chart for membership fees throughout SAGE/OLLI history.]

1996: In the fifth year of the SAGE program, Dr. Eversoll can no longer conduct the entire program planning for SAGE. It is determined that SAGE members need to take some responsibility for program planning, the beginning of what became the Curriculum Committee.

1999: Dr. Eversoll sends a letter, dated September 21, to all SAGE members. The letter’s primary focus deals with the declining SAGE enrollment. In October, the volunteer Group of 21 meets to discuss the future of SAGE. From the Group of 21, a steering committee (Gordon Culver, Marie Knickrehm, Marge Thomssen, and Lyle Young) meets with Dr. Eversoll with three recommendations: lower the yearly fee to $200, charge $35 for each six-session course, offer fewer sessions, and develop a curriculum committee for program planning.

2001: Membership in SAGE drops to an all-time low of 80 individuals. The suggested yearly fee for 2002 is $220 for full membership, $100 for partial membership, and $60 for one course of six sessions. Many members say they feel that SAGE is pricing them out of existence. SAGE is at a crossroads. Seven members (Sid and Gordon Culver, Tom Miller, Ann Morgan, Marge Thomssen, Marge and Lyle Young) take it upon themselves to create an ad hoc committee to determine how to keep SAGE from folding. Dr. Eversoll is kept informed of the committee’s progress. The ad hoc committee sends a letter to the CEO and President of the University of Nebraska Foundation. The letter outlines the need for an active learning program such as SAGE
at UNL for the increasing number of retired people in the area. A meeting is requested between SAGE and the University of Nebraska Foundation.

[For more detail about the founding years, the best resource is the January 2012 issue of “The OLLI Insider” newsletter, which was dedicated to the celebration of the institute’s 20th anniversary at UNL. That document can be found in the History Folder in the OLLI BOX at https://unl.box.com/s/wjb5gfrygi4n8gcmerzhlj0fwxh7n07. The newsletter contains reflections from several of the founders.]

The Transitional Years

2002: University of Nebraska-Lincoln undergoes serious budget reductions. The Division of Continuing Studies is eliminated, and Dr. Deanna Eversoll’s position as Director of Evening Programs is eliminated. As a result, SAGE requires a new classroom, administrative home, and leader. The ad hoc committee makes three key decisions: SAGE must become self-sufficient, must increase membership, and must raise money.

- The ad hoc committee and the University of Nebraska Foundation Director of Development and Assistant Director of Development hold a series of meetings to develop a plan for a SAGE fund drive. A goal of $20,000 is set for the fund drive. The goal is equivalent to the amount needed to operate SAGE for one year. Two SAGE charter members offer matching $5,000 grants to get the fund started.
- The Ad Hoc committee writes to Harvey Perlman, Chancellor of UNL, acknowledging SAGE’s funding problems, advising that SAGE is becoming fiscally self-sustaining, and asking him to support SAGE. Perlman responds positively.
- In November, SAGE formally reorganizes and selects a board of directors. Marge Thomssen is selected as the chair.
- In December, a Memorandum of Understanding is signed between SAGE and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Alumni Association that allows SAGE to become an association within the Alumni Association. The Alumni Association’s liaison with SAGE initiates a marketing plan.

2003: Dr. Deanna Eversoll, during a speaking engagement, meets Mr. Bernard Osher, a successful businessman who created The Bernard Osher Foundation that supports lifelong learning. Following that meeting, the SAGE board receives a request from The Bernard Osher Foundation to submit a proposal to become an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Two requirements must be met before any potential grants will be considered: change the name of SAGE to the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) and make it an affiliate to a specific accredited college within UNL.

Having lost access to classroom space at UNL, SAGE begins discussions with the Legacy Retirement Centers concerning the use of space. A Memorandum of Understanding is signed specifying that the Legacy at 56th and Pioneers would provide temporary classroom space and an office for SAGE for a yearly fee of $600, renewable annually.

By October, SAGE has 71 sustaining members, 21 sampler members, and four guests for a total of 96 members.

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SAGE is informed by the University of Nebraska Foundation that the SAGE Developmental Fund had reached $21,011.03. SAGE exceeds its goal of $20,000.

**2004:** Osher Foundation awards SAGE a renewable grant of $100,000. SAGE officially becomes OLLI. Thanks to Dean Marjorie Kostelnik, OLLI becomes a program in the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS) at UNL. Deanna Eversoll returns, temporarily, to oversee the growing program. Board of directors' name is changed to OLLI Council.

[For more detail about the transitional years, the best resource is the History Folder in the OLLI BOX at https://unl.box.com/s/wjb5gfrwygi4n8gcmcrzhlj0fwxh7n07. Multiple jpg. Files contain an in-depth history of SAGE for the years 2002 and 2003, written by Marge Young who served the organization in several positions.

Also available in the History Folder is the original proposal or abstract to the Osher Foundation from SAGE to become OLLI, written and submitted by Dean Marjorie Kostelnik. With that file is one piece of correspondence, dated January 16, 2004, received from Mary Bitterman, Director of Lifelong Learning Institutes for the Osher Foundation, in which she cites a few changes that need to be made to the original submission.]

**The Growth Years**

**2005:** Osher Grant renews at $100,000, the same amount as in 2004. Deanna Eversoll hires Dee Aguilar to become Program Assistant. OLLI at UNL creates a “stand-alone” website. (It had previously had a presence on the Alumni Association website.)

**2006:** Osher Grant renews for third year at same amount. First OLLI at UNL newsletter is mailed to all members. First of many open house events is held to promote membership.

**2007:** A fourth and final year of the renewable grant is funded. A number of “firsts” occur:

- First radio commercials for OLLI are broadcast on KFOR.
- OLLI creates marketing partnership with Nebraska Educational Telecommunications.
- Partnership is developed with Keith Larson, editor of the “55+,” Lincoln’s “free” senior newspaper.
- University of Nebraska Emeriti Association creates a partnership with OLLI, paying for retired faculty members’ first-year membership in OLLI.
- Curriculum Committee reorganizes itself into thematic sub-committees.
- Planning begins for an OLLI travel program.
- Membership increases to more than 680 members.
- Dr. Deanna Eversoll retires on June 30; she continues her involvement with OLLI as a member. Dee Aguilar becomes first full-time Project Coordinator.

**2008:** OLLI at UNL now meets necessary criteria to submit an application to the Osher Foundation for a $1 million endowment: more than 500 members, an in-depth program of study, and an academic home. Receipt of the endowment is announced in June 2008. A one-time $50,000 bridge grant from Osher Foundation is received to provide funds to support the organization while the $1 million endowment is invested and earning prior to any distributions. Dean Kostelnik, Dean of CEHS, provides expanded staff support, office space, and dedicated

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classrooms on UNL’s East Campus. At the time, the annual membership fee is $50. The “OLLI Insider” becomes the primary form of communication with members. Travel program begins with some day trips and a trip to Washington, D.C.

2009: OLLI adopts the slogan “Curiosity never retires.” Council agrees to conduct an annual fund drive with the goal of $20,000. (Only the interest on the $1 million endowment can be used to sustain the institute. Additional funding is still needed.)

2010: OLLI introduces “Happenings,” a weekly electronic newsletter to members. Membership fee is increased to $75 for the full year and $50 for a mid-year membership. OLLI bylaws are rewritten. Marketing focus changes from a broad spectrum to a more targeted marketing demographic. A DVD presentation called “OLLI at UNL” is produced.

2011: Current membership reaches more than 800. Annual membership fees remain constant. New goals are set by the OLLI Council: create a 2015 vision, increase membership retention, reach out to diverse populations, and extend OLLI programs beyond Lancaster County.

2012: OLLI celebrates its 20th anniversary.

2013: With OLLI membership now exceeding 1,000, the Osher Foundation invites OLLI at UNL to apply for a second $1 million endowment. A strategic plan is developed and implemented.

2014: The second $1 million endowment is awarded to OLLI at UNL in 2014. This is the last of the grants and endowments from the Osher Foundation. OLLI continues to conduct an Annual Ask for additional funding. Part-time Communications Associate position is added to staff.

[For more detail about the growth years, again, the best resource is the History Folder in the OLLI BOX at https://unl.box.com/s/wjb5gfryygi4n8gcmcrzhlj0fwxh7n07. The original Osher Endowment Agreement between the Osher Foundation, University of Nebraska Foundation and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln can be found in this file.

A reservoir of OLLI documents from this period of time can be found on the Osher Drive on a UNL server. For access to these many electronic files, one needs to contact an OLLI staff member. Among the folders that can be found there are: Osher Foundation correspondence, board/council minutes, annual budgets, committees, bylaws/policies and procedures, issues of the “OLLI Insider,” annual reports to the Osher Foundation since 2005, and fund-raising documents.]

The Development Years

2015: OLLI at UNL expands and matures in a number of ways during 2015.

- Curriculum committee offers more than 175 courses during the 2014-2015 academic year.

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• Council reaffirms OLLI’s intended relationship with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in carrying out the requirements of the approved endowment agreements with a new Memorandum of Agreement.
• Council establishes the Pillar Society for OLLI at UNL for the purpose of creating its own endowment through the University of Nebraska Foundation. In the first year, 70 members pledged more than $70,000, more than enough to establish the endowment.
• Interest Groups grow out of course activities and quickly gain in popularity.
• OLLI launches an initiative for inclusiveness and diversity.
• OLLI holds initial discussions with Winter Lecture Series, hosted by the Unitarian Church, on the possibility of collaborating.
• A full-time Events Coordinator is hired to facilitate travel and special events.
• OLLI at UNL Facebook page goes live.

2016: Membership surpasses 1,500. Travel opportunities become more plentiful. Staff and volunteers focus on changing needs of a growing membership.


2018: Membership surpasses 1,700. The rewritten Policies and Procedures are implemented. OLLI Council changes name to Advisory Council. A Curriculum Coordinator is hired to facilitate the expanding curriculum. Distance Learning Ad Hoc Committee begins to explore development of a distance learning curriculum.

2019: An OLLI Showcase is designed and implemented to market its programs in lieu of the traditional open house program.

2020: In a most unexpected circumstance, with the arrival of COVID-19, plans for distance/virtual learning that had been in the “discussion stage” are quickly implemented so that programming can continue in spite of the pandemic. Membership remains above 1,000. Dr. Deanna Aguilar announces her retirement, and a search committee is formed to hire her successor.

[For more detail about the development years, a helpful resource is the History Folder in the OLLI BOX at https://unl.box.com/s/wjb5gfrwygi4n8gcmerzhli0fwxh7n07. A copy of the OLLI Insider that marks the 25th anniversary of OLLI can be found there. It offers an abbreviated timeline and one article dedicated to “the dream.”]

Again, a reservoir of OLLI documents from this period of time can be found on the Osher Drive on a UNL server. For access to these many electronic files, one needs to contact an OLLI staff member. Among the folders that can be found there are: Osher Foundation correspondence, board/council minutes, annual budgets, committees, bylaws/policies and procedures, issues of the “OLLI Insider,” annual reports to the Osher Foundation since 2005, and fund-raising.]

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