**The Covid-19 Classroom**

*Sue Anderson, OLLI director, and Lacey Kendall, an OLLI instructor and media specialist at Cal State San Bernardino, exchange thoughts about the opportunities — and the challenges —of remote learning.*

**A POLAND**: Today two OLLI stars exchange thoughts about the challenges and opportunities of the pandemic classroom. They’re encouraging yet cautionary tales from the trenches next.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**A POLAND:** Welcome to *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. OLLI, O-L-L-I is an acronym for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute located at and networked with the Palm Desert Campus of California State University San Bernardino. Here are two of the schools engaging personalities.

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**L KENDALL**: When I was a little girl, I wanted to be something that was physical like be a professional athlete or I might’ve at the time thought I would like to be a mail lady. I did not see myself going to college, but my parents always wanted me to go a little bit further and do a little bit better.

**A POLAND:** One of our instructors, Lacey Kendall’s dream of becoming a letter carrier never materialized. As for being a jock however, she did become a radio disc *jockey* but then her life took a sudden turn.

**L KENDALL**: When my parents passed away, I decided to do something as a favor for them and take a masters class. I got an A. I ended up getting my master’s degree and I graduated Magna Cum Laude. Got nothing but A, and I have never gotten straight A’s in my life.

**A POLAND:** Academia called and Lacey answered… big time. She currently serves as media consultant to serval local university and college campuses. She teaches at both Cal State and for our treasured OLLI program. Her media and tech expertise as well as her humanity, serve her well in this new virtual learning world. Her parents would have been pleased.

**S ANDERSON**: Congratulations Lacey, I am sure they’re very proud of you.

**L Kendall:** (CHUCKLES) Thank you.

**A POLAND:** Like Lacey, Sue Anderson’s early dreams also did not come true, fortunately.

**S ANDERSON:** I wanted to be either an attorney or a stewardess. That’s what we called them at that time, a stewardess. Now we say a flight attendant. I had no clarity of direction. I had no goals. For a long time, I was doing a lot of retail jobs and waitressing. I did that for quite a while. When I was in my mid-thirties, I finally went to college. From the moment I stepped into the classroom, I fell in love and I never left.

**A POLAND**: Well it has been a mutual love affair for Sue and OLLI. Today Sue runs the Osher program here at the Palm Desert campus of Cal State San Bernardino. One of the most respected in the country and believe me this is not an overstatement. She is absolutely revered by our community.

**S ANDERSON:** And being here as the director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute really is sort of the culmination of my whole background. I am the youngest of nine siblings, four of which are in their eighties. So, the demographic, the people that I work with here at OLLI are like family to me. It is just so natural for me to be in this environment.

**L KENDALL:** Sue is so beloved on the PDC campus.

**S ANDERSON:** That’s very kind. Thank you. Lacey, what I love about Lacey is her wonderful spirit of collaboration.

**L KENDALL:** It’s tough to do that these days.

**S ANDERSON:** We absolutely miss that in person, face to face contact. The ability to reach out and give someone a hug or to shake or just a touch. You know that allows you to connect in that very special way with people but, learning online and the platforms that we were forced to adapt in these past few months have opened up new opportunities. Now we have people who are learning with us from Canada, New England, Iowa, and our reimagining the program has allowed us to reach people we normally haven’t been connecting with. That’s been really terrific.

**L KENDALL:** That is a really good point. I heard Dr. Morales say “this is not a door closer, it is a door opener in so many ways than we had ever imagined.” For example, we can have professors that live in France or in Germany. Now people think like that. Hey I can teach a class in another country.

**S ANDERSON:** I am so glad you mention that Lacey because we just received a course proposal for our winter term from an instructor in Australia. Who has taught similar classes for the OLLI at UCLA. Fascinating topics, some great music courses.

**L KENDALL:** Aha.

**S ANDERSON:** In fact, he’s proposing to teach from Australia. And so, we would have to schedule so it can be a live interactive class. We will schedule it early morning for him, which will be evening class for us but it will be live and interactive. So, we really are excited for those possibilities.

**L KENDALL:** Yeah, but I will tell you, when we initially jumped to this in a minute, everybody in education, business, and everyone in this country, it seemed like a horrific hindrance. I’ll give you an example. My students, their job is to create commercials, promos, and sweepers, and content for newscasting, things like that for the campus radio station. Normally, they go to the radio station to do that. So, how would I handle that class when no students are allowed on the campus radio station. So, I just created nine projects. All of those things they had to do. We have more student created content and you cannot tell the difference btw them using a $700 mic and them using the little tiny one from their phone because they learned to use it optimally. And our station is just packed with student created content like how to stay happy when you’re in quarantine? Fun things to do with your family, health tips and a number of concerns that are in the community and in the Coachella Valley and beyond might have. The station sounds better than it ever did. So, you figure out how to go as far you can with just what you have… and that is how you succeed.

**S ANDERSON:** That is fabulous. It must have been such an empowering experience for those students.

**L KENDALL:** Yeah. So, what has been your biggest struggle Sue?

**S ANDERSON:**  Well, I think one of the things that does still tug at me is that yes there are a lot of wonderful opportunities. That’s all wonderful, and those that are there really appreciate it. We get communications all the time about how much people appreciate it and all the courses, events, and activities that we continue to do online but I know there is a significant number who either can’t or choose not to participate and they’re home largely alone and alienated. That is still really hard to come to grips with. There are people who would be with us in the classroom if we could. It really does illustrate what we are hearing in the news. This pandemic is just accentuating the divide. So, yes in many ways it has brought many new opportunities and some really fun new elements and ways we can increase and expand our participation as an OLLI program. There are some people who are really suffering on this time and they’re a part of our community too.

**L KENDALL:** I told my students that if they’re scared or if there is trouble at their house or anything, that I don’t have to be a teacher all the time. I could just be a friend you can call. I said that is the only way you can do that…you got to give verbal hugs. You got to say, “I really am here and I really, really do care.” I wrote them a letter too. I wrote a letter to all my students and that was just for the purpose of saying that I really do care about you guys and I really do want to know. I’m a secret keeper and a really good friend to have.

**S ANDERSON:** We’ve had a lot of situations where we are reaching out to people individually. And walking them through the steps one on one. People who have said and I would add members and instructors who said “no way can I never do the online thing.” I will wait until we are back in the classroom.” And we are not going to be in the classroom this fall. We have more and more people who are saying “ok, I will give it a try if you help me.” So, we’ve modified our instructor course proposal form, to say yes, I will try it on zoom if you help me. We’ve been doing a lot of outreach, one on one to members who said “ok, if you help me, I will try it.” I have OLLI members in my neighborhood and I have gone to some homes through the window with a mask “and now click here, then this,” and then you see them in class the next day. You did it. Good for you. Good for you.

**L KENDALL:** My students are a little younger and are more tech savvy. I watch them as they help each other to get better at that, they say “what do I do? I have no signal at my house. I was going to my best friend’s house but my mom doesn’t want me to go over to anybody’s house anymore.” There were four students in class, and they said, “Danielle talk to me after class I will give you some places.” I said to a student in my class, “Alex what advise did you give her? What was the advice?” he says “Oh, there’s about four places. She lives in Cathedral City and there is about four places there where you can go and park your car underneath a tree and there’s loads of Wi-Fi and it’s really comfortable and it is super quiet.” I said, “How do you know that?” “Because I used it.” And I started collecting notes on where the best spots were but my classes I can see their places. They’re in a room, patio, and just a little shack or in a car parked under the tree. You get a different view into the lives and the world of your whole class in ways you never did before.

**S ANDERSON:** These circumstances are forcing or encouraging people to be very creative and ingenious, and resourceful. Their expectations are changing. I love that we are doing this conversation today via zoom, when just like our students who said no way three or four months ago we said no we can’t do that except in a perfect studio where it is sound proof and quiet and ideal. Here we are on zoom, no special equipment of any kind, having a conversation because this is the only way we can do it. So, we’re going to make the best of it.

**L KENDALL:** And tricks. We’ve learned tricks, haven’t we?

**S ANDERSON:** That is right. And then you will do your magic behind the scenes. Instead of in front of the scenes.

**L KENDALL:** Yes, I am talking to you now with my laptop instead of on the desk. It’s on a shag carpet bathroom mat because it makes the audio a little bit better when it is not on hard surfaces. We are going to strip the audio off of zoom and then I am going to take it because I am an audio engineer. I’m going to take that audio piece and equalize it a little bit and add some warmth to it and I trust that just like my students have learned you can make wonderful audio with minimalist tools. I think we will find that we were able to do greatness here as well.

**S ANDERSON:** Every confidence. I just… I am really excited about that. I am glad that we are moving forward with this project because *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*, I love that idea and I think now more than ever, hearing people voices is just so powerful and it allows us to continue connecting in yet another way.

**L KENDALL:** Yeah. I would take this to your students as well Sue. This is a wonderful time to jump on board with OLLI or as a student of any age at our campus because in just a few short months we have all gotten very good at this. It is very human and the emotions are very real but the learning has never stopped.

**S ANDERSON:** It has really accelerated the learning in a way we didn’t expect.

**L KENDALL:** Our campus is really good at this.

**S ANDERSON:** You’re right. We have a great IT team who is supporting all of us literally overnight.

**L KENDALL:** Mhm.

**S ANDERSON:** I do have a funny story that I’d like to share. One of our first OLLI classes, when we were on zoom and we were all getting used to the idea of being on camera and on microphone. So, at the start of the class we would do a little welcome and announce some guidelines like remember to turn off your cellphone and everyone can hear you if you are having a conversation in your home unless you mute yourself. People just weren’t used to that yet. I don’t recall which class it was but one of our OLLI members was watching I think from a tablet, an iPad, or another tablet sitting back on her bed. During the class she decided to get up and move around which is fine, you can do that when you are on zoom and you can do that in your own home. So, she got up but then she started rearranging somethings. She had turned her back to the camera and bent over and was like ‘oops’ (LAUGHS)

**L KENDALL:** Oh no.

**S ANDERSON:** She was wearing a dress and I thankfully, I was paying attention and quickly turned off her video.

**L KENDALL:** (LAUGHS)

**S ANDERSON:** So now, we are careful to remind everyone that you are not only sharing your audio but we can see whatever you are doing when your video is turned on.

**L KENDALL:** Yeah, I had in the first quarter of last quarter when we were teaching this it was very new. I had done what everyone else was doing now. I had a nice shirt on, a nice outfit for my class but on the bottom, I had a big o’ pair of like, you know sleeping shorts. A giant pair of men’s giant pair of boxers and the cat started scratching at the door here to the office, and was going, “Meow, Meow, Meow.” And I said, “Yes you got to forgive me I got this old cat here. I’m going to go put her by the back door ok. Forgive me.”
And I got up, the camera is pointed low enough and you can see I was wearing these silly shorts. When I came back they were snickering. I just went on talking and a few minutes into my conversation, I realized what they were laughing at. I stopped and I went, “You saw my big goofy sleeping shorts.” They all just started cracking up. That was a fun moment.

**S ANDERSON:** And we have also met a lot of people’s pets recently. It is not at all uncommon to have someone’s cat or dog come across the screen or on the lap which is really fun. We have all kinds of fun nicknames for people’s pets now.

**L KENDALL:** Yeah, yeah. I love that part too. We are getting to know other animals.

**S ANDERSON:** Yes, that’s right. You learn a lot about someone from their home environment and it is really interesting to see people in their home environment. I think of the fact that we were… we needed to make this shift to online learning so quickly has really shown us that it really isn’t as painful as we thought it would be. I fully expect that we will continue offering online programs indefinitely now. Even when we can come back to campus, there are people who prefer learning online and prefer the flexibility of learning from their computer or wherever they may be. They can participate in a class from their smartphone. So, we will continue to offer online courses now. We have made the leap and we’re there. We know how to do it and I think we will also continue to evolve with the sophistication of our online programming. Perhaps we will do some on demand programming at some point, where people can choose the time and place where they can listen to a class. So, I am glad, but I am certainly not glad about the pandemic but, I am glad that it forced us to make the leap into online learning because I think it is a really nice supplement, compliment to having courses on campus. Moving our courses online has caused us to make adjustments in some situations. For example, we offer a lot of film courses, film appreciation courses taught by some terrific instructors and they have been a big part of our OLLI program for many years. Because of the shift to online programming, there are some copyright fair use rules that are different. So, we are not able to offer full length feature films as we did in the classroom. So, we have to modify how we present those programs online and I am very grateful for our instructors who’ve been flexible in helping us make that shift. So, for example, now we can approach our film classes in different ways. One might be that the class will meet together via zoom for an introduction of the film by the instructor and he will outline somethings they might want to look at or for. Then the class will disperse and watch the film on their own through an online streaming service or via YouTube or whatever that platform is where it is available. Then we will reconvene again after the film at a designated time, to discuss the film. So that is one possibility. Another option is for the instructor to break the film up into different segments so they’re not showing the whole film in one sitting. That will be another but different approach to continuing our focus on film appreciation but just in a different way.

**L KENDALL:** I helped thirty plus churches over the summer time to figure out how to reach their hospital or bed bound members of their congregation. I think anyone who is bed bound or hospital bound can now—because we have now gotten better at this. We put a laptop on them or an iPad, they can connect to church, schools, programs and we have brought a lot of focus back because we got smarter.

**S ANDERSON:** And our ability to reach out to people that we might not have served previously is now much more open. People who cannot come to campus can now participate via technology from anywhere. Either if they’re home bound or in a nursing facility or traveling, then they have the ability to connect. Our challenge now is in marketing and reaching those people to communicate this opportunity to them.

**L KENDALL:** Not only that. We are not only able to bring more people into our classrooms or into our groups or churches or what have you but we are allowed to bring a vast array of previously impossible guest speakers and participants.

**S ANDERSON:** I love that Lacey. Also, the OLLI book club has now been able to invite authors of the books they are reading to participate and engage in their conversation via zoom. They’ve had several authors now who have joined their monthly book club meetings and that has been really fun. Something that they would not have been able to do. Similarly, we have been hosting some happy hours, OLLI happy hours where we have really been able to open up and highlight some of the talent within the ranks of our membership and instructor pool. For example, our first one was Mark Guerrero singing on the guitar, singing the music of The Beatles and that was really fun. Cash Baxter did a sketching and painting demonstration as a fine arts painter. Michael McDowell took us on a tour of the Eastern Sierras through his incredible photography. So, it has been really fun to experiment with some of these opportunities. We have opened those up for everyone. So yeah, it’s a big deal.

**A POLAND:** Sue Anderson… Lacey Kendall

**S ANDERSON:** (LAUGHS) You’re really good Lacey.

(LAUGHTER)

**L KENDALL:**  Thanks! You are too.

**A POLAND:** Two of the nearly one-thousand vibrant voices of OLLI at the Palm Desert Campus of Cal State San Bernardino. And here are others.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**MEMBER 1:** Our OLLI, our Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, we offer a wide variety of courses, and member events, and educational travel for people fifty and older, who just love to learn.

**MEMBER 2**: From Economics to environmental issues to art and film making.

**MEMBER 3:** There is no tests, homework, books.

**MEMBER 4:** No grades. You can just enjoy learning for the love of it.

**MEMBER 5:** You are almost as passionate about learning it, as I am of teaching it.

**MEMBER 6:** Interaction of the people that you meet is just incredible.

**MEMBER 7:** A whole other level of socialization. It is not just over a glass of wine or a cup of coffee, it is over an idea, a subject, a thought.

**MEMBER 8:** I just love going to school.

**MEMBER 9:** My head is still in the game and I want it to be.

**MEMBER 10:** We got an incredibly fascinating educative accomplished student body.

**MEMBER 11:** There is not a student here that doesn’t have a post education in life.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC ENDS)

**A POLAND**: Want to know more about us? Find us online at osher.csusb.edu. I know I said it fast but let me repeat it for you. Osher.csusb which stands for California State University San Bernardino .edu … or hey you could also call us at (909) 537-8270. Again, it is (909) 537-8270. We’d love to hear your voice.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**A POLAND:** This has been *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. Our thanks to Cal State San Bernardino in Palm Desert. Along with the communications study professor, Lacey Kendall and her media students. This podcast was produced for OLLI by Lou Gorfain and I am Dr. Arlette Poland.