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Forever Learning: Whether it's to switch careers or for your own personal enrichment, the learning process should never stop. And on the First Coast, there are countless avenues to take. From newly minted high school grads to seniors on the verge of retirement, classrooms are full of students looking for the next opportunity.

EAT, PRAY, LEARN

➤ A THRIVING CLASSROOM CULTURE MAKES LEARNING FUN. ESPECIALLY WITH WINE ➤

BY CANDACE MOODY

It's a chilly Saturday morning at the University of North Florida, and the 25 students in the room are introducing themselves. The 50-something chemical engineer. The 67-year-old grandmother. The stay-at-home mom. The professional actor with a couple of film credits, accompanied by two friends he's known since college. The marketing executive and the children's book author. We're all here for the next eight hours to get the answer to the same burning question: How do we transform our Oscar-worthy screenplay idea into a script and get it into Steven Spielberg's hands?

We humans all enter childhood with the conviction that we're geniuses. Mom helps by proclaiming every crayon drawing to be a masterpiece. As adults, we may have to get a "real" job to earn a living, but our inner screenwriter, standup comedian, gourmet chef or ballerina never dies.

So we head to one of dozens of classes offered all over the city on any given week-night or Saturday. An online search for "fun classes in Jacksonville" yields hundreds of results: martial arts to belly dancing, dog training and outdoor survival to improv and standup comedy. If you're athletic, you can explore fencing, ice-skating, surfing, yoga and, yes, pole dancing. For aspiring writers, there are classes on how to write poetry, novels, screenplays and children's books. For the foodie, there are cooking classes conducted by local and visiting chefs. You can learn how to set up a wine tasting, can your own food or brew your own beer.

The largest local provider of personal development classes is UNF's Learn Jacksonville, run by program director Valerie Murphy. Learn Jacksonville started in the spring of 2008 and has served over 3,900 students since its inception. About 15 classes a month are offered at the University Center. Classes cost an average

of \$69, usually for four or eight hours of instruction.

UNF also hosts the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), a membership organization for people age 50 and above that buys access to classes and field trips for \$45 a year. Class prices range from \$7 for a 90-minute workshop to \$85 for 13 weeks of instruction. The group convenes several socials each year and offers walking tours, group outings to museums and concerts, and 60 or 70 classes each term. Jeanette Toohey, OLLI's program director, says that the most popular class they've offered is "Christianity: The Early Years," which currently has 95 students. Technology is also a popular topic; seniors work on mastering iPhones and social media or setting up their GPS device.

The Duval County Extension is a partnership between the City of Jacksonville, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Its courses focus on gardening, agriculture (4H programs are part of the program) and domestic arts. Courses on budgeting, nutrition and health, home design and repair average \$20-\$30.

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation offers a class on restoring your historic St. Augustine home. You can dance to traditional or modern Israeli music on a couple of Tuesdays each month at the Beth Israel Messianic Congregation, or drop in for \$5 and line dance to Christian music at DanceFit Studio in Mandarin. Learn to make your own sushi at the Chef's Cooking Studio in St. Augustine. If you're planning a trip, you can work on mastering conversation or ordering off the menu in almost any language, thanks to offerings at the local colleges and universities.

UNF's Murphy says that across all topics the program offers, demographics are con-

sistent: about 75 percent of all students are women, which seems to be true in most personal development classes. Publix Apron's cooking school (offered at the 10500 San Jose Blvd. store in Mandarin) actively promotes classes as the ideal "Girls Night Out" event. Its cooking demonstrations include wine and the meal that's prepared, making the \$45 cost seem like a bargain.

Yes You Canvas! sums up the spirit of learning for fun: its website (yesyoucanvas.com) invites you to "come as you are...leave as an artist." And the site's Frequently Asked Questions cuts right to the point: "Can we bring wine?" *

CONTINUING ED

Never Too Late

Always wanted to go to Yale or Harvard, but don't want to leave the warm Jacksonville beaches? Many Ivy League schools and other top colleges have recently started offering continuing education classes and professional certifications online.

While acing your SAT would barely get you a glance at the admissions office at Harvard, the school's extension classes are open to the public, and there is no application process; although some classes do require prerequisites or placement tests. Yale has a nice selection of free online courses, but most seem to be more for entertainment than professional development, with subjects such as modern poetry, physics and astronomy. Each college has a range of requirements for admission, so check with that school's admissions office for specifics.

Many of the schools that were allowing students to take online courses at the same price as state residents, such as the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, have changed that policy; so if the school is not in Florida, the cost of a course can be double or triple the usual in-state tuition, with classes costing around \$800 and up. *

BY KAKI FLYNN