

# Seniors college program stresses 'learning for pure joy'

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Education Reporter

It's grey matter material for grey-haired students.

Seniors can now get back into the classroom, thanks to a new program starting up in Halifax this fall. But neither homework nor tests is required to pass the diverse courses offered through Nova Scotia's first-ever seniors college.

"It's meant to be learning for pure joy," Robert Rodger, an energetic 81-year-old who is chairman of the task force heading up the initiative, said Tuesday over doughnuts and coffee inside Dalhousie University's Life Sciences Centre.

"No certificates, no qualifications . . . just fun."

Mr. Rodger, a former psychology professor, is a member of the Association of Dalhousie Retirees and Pensioners. The association became determined to start up affordable schooling for the province's, well, most mature students after hearing about the success of a seniors college on Prince Edward Island that is offering an incredible 100 courses to seniors.

"It was so absolutely fascinating, we thought maybe we should try that here," Mr. Rodger said of learning about P.E.I.'s school for seniors during a panel discussion in September 2006.

Just one year later, seniors college in Halifax is kicking off its first semester.

The college is open to anyone age 50 or older for a membership fee of \$60. The cost covers access to all four courses available this fall, which each unfold in two-hour weekly meetings at various Sobeys community centres across the city.

Classes start at the beginning of October and run for eight to 10 weeks. This semester, the four classes are Islam, Peace and Terrorism; Interpreting the King James Bible as Literature; Managing Your Money and Writing for Life. Instructors are given a small hon-



Seniors college instructor Jack Potter, registrar Blanche Potter and task force chair Robert Rodger walk through Dalhousie University's campus in Halifax on Tuesday.

(PETER PARSONS / Staff)

orarium for helping out.

"It's lifelong learning opportunities for seniors, by seniors," fellow task force member Jack Potter chipped in as he and his colleagues chatted in the Dal retirees association's cramped office.

That means the students will get to decide what they learn next semester, whether it's modern medicine, music appreciation, genealogy or sign language.

Mr. Potter, 51, is teaching the Writing for Life course, which, depending on what his students want to learn, could examine fiction, non-fiction, biographies, poetry, grammar and more.

"Participants will actually write every week. I lock the door. They don't get out," he said, inciting chuckles all around.

Mr. Rodger said expanding your knowledge base is beneficial for anyone of any age.

"Your cognitive functions are going to be better maintained. Your probability of Alzheimer's disease and late-life dementia is reduced."

Not only is massaging the mind good

for your health but it truly is enjoyable, Mr. Rodger said.

"There is an idea out there that when you retire, you're put out to dry," he said. "You just sit there with your feet on the mantelpiece watching TV. That is not how it is."

The college is just one of many examples of seniors staying involved with the world around them, he said.

Mr. Potter's mother, task force member Blanche Potter, said that once the first semester has ended, motivated members will get to take ownership of the college by forming an independent committee.

"It will be their suggestions and their directions that will carry this on," the 75-year-old Ms. Potter said. "It's our dream to go provincewide."

A registration meeting will be held on Sept. 26 from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Sobeys community centre on Queen Street in Halifax. Registration forms can also be obtained at local libraries or through the association's website, [retireesandpensioners.dal.ca](http://retireesandpensioners.dal.ca).

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