



Worcester Institute for Senior Education

NEW MEMBER HANDBOOK

WISE Mission Statement

The Worcester Institute for Senior Education (WISE) at Assumption College is a member-directed organization providing lifelong learning opportunities for older adults.

Worcester Institute for Senior Education

Assumption College

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Greeting From the WISE President

Baltej Maini



Welcome to WISE, New Members.

On behalf of everyone at the Worcester Institute for Senior Education (WISE), and as your newly elected President, I am pleased to welcome you all to the WISE family.

Founded in 1992, WISE today boasts of greater than 500 members and continues the tradition of high-quality lifelong learning programs, coupled with an ever-increasing number and variety of educational courses. I am confident that you will enjoy the large variety of courses offered. Some of you may even volunteer to teach a very curious and enlightened group of older learners.

WISE is undergoing a significant transformation as it races to keep up with the rapid transformations in technology. In that regard, we are starting with changes in the Website (assumptionwise.org), to make it more user-friendly. Please watch the evolution of our web-based learning tool!

And finally, we are looking for more volunteers in our community to serve as members of various committees that keep our wheels moving. Please contact me (baltej.maini@gmail.com) with any suggestions that you may have.

Enjoy your learning journey!

Tej Maini

President
Worcester Institute for Senior Education



ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS | ROME, ITALY

Greeting from the President of Assumption College

Francesco Cesareo, PhD

For more than 25 years Assumption College has been the proud home of the WISE program. Regardless of age, learning is a life-long endeavor. This is something we instill in our undergraduate students as part of their education at Assumption. We want them to recognize that learning does not end the day they each receive their diploma, but rather, in many ways, just begins that day. The presence of WISE members on campus reinforces this important aspect of our mission and enriches the experience of our students, modeling for them what it means to be a lifelong learner.

What is particularly special about having WISE on campus is the opportunity for our students to interact and engage with WISE members across campus. Whether it is having a conversation inside or outside a classroom, holding a door for an older student, sitting by WISE members in Taylor Dining Hall, or being part of a class assignment, the experience of our students is enriched by the presence, wisdom, and life stories of WISE members. In this way WISE members are an integral part of the Assumption family, a presence we truly value.

Through the various courses, trips and programs that WISE sponsors its members can engage in lively intellectual conversations, experience enriching cultural activities, and hear stimulating lectures from leaders in various fields. Consequently WISE members continue to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world and of themselves, important by-products of lifelong learning.

I hope that you enjoy your experience of our campus and find the WISE Program rewarding. Welcome to WISE.

Francesco C. Cesareo, PhD

President

Assumption College

WISE and Lifelong Learning

Susan Perschbacher, PhD WISE Director

When WISE was formed twenty-five years ago, the founders shared an energizing spirit with older adults and retired citizens across America who sought new forms of engagement in retirement. According to Claire McGurn, Senior Manager at Road Scholar overseeing the lifelong learning network, there are approximately 400 lifelong learning programs across the United States. Twenty-one of these are in Massachusetts and 65 in New England.

What accounts for this phenomenon and for the continuing growth of this national (even international) trend? An answer comes readily when the benefits of lifelong learning for older adults are examined by social scientists.

Our WISE classes are very beneficial in **sharpening our minds**, our **confidence**, our **interpersonal skills**, and our **ability to communicate**. Think of yourself, sitting in a WISE class—how actively you are thinking, perhaps getting ready to share your own thoughts and experiences, reaching out to others around you, and feeling that life is truly exciting at this very moment.

Our WISE classes **perpetuate our education**; lifelong learning **enhances educational attainment** and contributes to **learn new ways of thinking**. Put another way, we are never too old to learn!

All the activities of WISE **promote an engaged lifestyle** that contributes to a **sense of community and belonging**. As Jill Lagana and I work in the office during the summer we continually hear from our members, “When do classes start? I am ready to get going again.”

Learning and leadership opportunities with WISE **increase our understanding** of self and of society. Think of the personal stories that come up in WISE class discussion. Think, as well, of the times you have an “aha” moment in the classroom because you have gained a new understanding of an experience in your life. Participation in a WISE committee **sharpens leadership abilities**.

Lifelong learning helps WISE members to **fulfill curiosity, to understand the environment, to feel more integrated into the life around them, and to keep active**. Many members get the membership from their families and/or are encouraged to join in order to be constructively engaged after a difficult transition in life.

Health studies show that lifelong learning and engagement contribute to **better emotional health** and help **reduce possible cognitive decline of aging**. These programs help older adults deal with depression and, potentially, a poor self-image that might accompany the aging process.

In general, WISE and other lifelong learning programs contribute to a **better quality of life**. For all these reasons we are indebted to the founders of WISE, and we are grateful the WISE Program continues to thrive and grow.

WISE Curriculum

Jane Gilligan, Curriculum Committee Member and Group Leader

When asked what they liked most about WISE, 96% of members referred to “the Courses” on a 2016 survey. The richness and growth of the curriculum are reflected in the outstanding group leaders, the academic rigor and diversity of the courses, the contributions of the group members, and the work of the Curriculum Committee. The support of Assumption College and the hospitality of outside venues result in warm and comfortable locations for these courses.

In Spring 1993, WISE began by offering eight courses, including “Fathers and Daughters—A Universal Theme,” a literature course, and “Play Reading.” Since then, more than 1100 distinct courses have been given in over 25 years, and more than 300 group leaders have taught for WISE. In Spring 2019, 40 courses were offered, and a total of 80 were listed for 2018-2019, compared to the total of 25 in 1993-1994.

Four five-week sessions each year are given, with courses across the spectrum from art, music, and drama to science, philosophy, religion, history, and literature. With the increase in WISE membership, more courses are added or repeated to reduce long wait lists for popular offerings. WISE courses reflect talented and dedicated Group Leaders.

The advantages of the curriculum to the WISE membership are many. One dues payment allows members to take as many courses as they wish; some attend as many as six or eight per session. Given the diverse life and educational experiences of WISE members class discussion are often lively and interesting, contributing to the learning experience. We carefully evaluate WISE courses. Members complete an evaluation form for each course. These evaluations are carefully read, and the faculty receive individual letters summarizing the results.

The Curriculum Committee is composed of WISE members who represent a cross-section of members’ experiences and expertise; all are volunteers who meet monthly except for January, July and August. The Committee reviews written proposals from the Group Leaders and decides which courses to offer that reflect the eclectic and rigorous nature of the curriculum and the outstanding qualifications of the teachers, many of whom are affiliated with local institutions of higher learning.

WISE members value face-to-face classes. They appreciate “the easy give and take of the classroom” and “the social aspect of being with friends and learning together,” as members commented in the survey. One member stated, “WISE does a tremendous job offering a variety of courses at a variety of times and at a variety of locations.” The diversity of the courses, the quality of the Group Leaders, and the contributions to class discussions by the group members result in the outstanding WISE curriculum.

WISE Membership

The Full Year membership fee is \$265.00 and the Half Year fee is \$165.00 per person. Fall members have the option of remaining a member for the Spring Term by paying an additional \$100.00. Membership fees can be paid by credit card on-line by going to <http://assumption.org>. If paying by check, please mail your membership form and payment directly to the WISE office. You can also stop by the WISE office to register by check or credit card

Membership Fees must be paid online or by check before you register for classes.

Membership at both levels includes all activities sponsored by WISE throughout the academic year. These include free WISE events such as the Brown Bag lectures as well as the many events sponsored by Assumption College. Other WISE activities such as museum trips, luncheons and dinners are available at affordable rates.

Scholarships for WISE membership are available to members of the Greater Worcester community who are unable to pay the full annual membership fee. Please see the Scholarship Application Form on-line or request one from the WISE Office. For those who receive a scholarship the annual membership fee is \$65.00

Benefits of Membership on the Assumption College Campus

Enjoy the following on campus at no cost with your Assumption College ID:

- D'Alzon Library
- Human Arts Programs
- Lectures
- Movies and Film Series
- Theatre and Musical Performances
- Sports Events

Receive a discount with your Assumption College ID at the following campus facilities:

- **Plourde Recreation Center** for exercise including in-door walking track, swimming pool, state-of-the-art athletic training machines and equipment
- **Taylor Dining Hall** for buffet lunches and/or dinners before/after class
- **Charlie's Snack Bar** in the Hagan Campus Center for lighter lunches and coffee

WISE Registration for Classes

Registration Procedure

All members need to pay the membership fee prior to registering for classes. Registration remains open while there are courses with available space. There is no minimum or maximum limit to the number of classes you may register for. Some members take as many as seven and eight each Session and others are enrolled in one. We do ask members to please attend the classes for which you are enrolled. If for any reason you cannot attend the course, please notify the WISE Office (508-767-7513). For courses with a wait list this means another WISE student can have the opportunity of taking the class.

Online registration is strongly recommended because members begin registration late at night (after midnight) and/or early in the morning on the designated registration day. On-line registration support is available through technology workshops or by contacting the WISE Office. Each semester we have more and more WISE members successfully registering on-line.

You can register by mail by returning the Registration form to the WISE Office before the registration date. As these registration forms are received, they are each given a number based on the order in which they come into the office. Beginning at 9:00 am on the morning of registration, office staff members will manually enter in your selections for courses. Because some courses fill quickly, we cannot guarantee a seat in any course if the on-line registrants have taken the spots.

When registration for each class is complete, WISE members receive an email informing them of their status in the class whether as registered for the class or placed on the Wait List.

If you are informed you are placed on the Wait List, you may still get into the class. As WISE members find out they have conflicts and withdraw from a class, WISE staff members add members from the Wait List, working in numerical order. In some of the larger classes as many as seven or eight students may be removed from the Wait List and enrolled in the class. In the case of some very popular courses (with long wait lists) the Curriculum Committee and Group Leader may decide to offer the course in the next term.

We ask any WISE member to let the office know if s/he is unable to attend a class for which s/he is registered. Very often we have a wait list with students who are eager to take the course. If for some reason you are unable to attend, please let us know as a courtesy to those who can take advantage of the class.



Public Safety/Campus Police

Parking Stickers

Members parking a car at Assumption College must purchase a parking permit for the upcoming or current academic year. Members need to fill out the form, "Application for Motor Vehicle Parking Permit" and submit it with fifteen dollars (\$15/00) to the WISE office. You may pay by cash or check; checks are made out to Assumption College. The Public Safety Department cannot accept money. Members then pick up their parking stickers at the Campus Police/Public Safety Office located in Kennedy Hall. At the beginning of the fall semester several days will be set aside before undergraduate classes begin for WISE members to get their parking stickers in a one-stop process.

Parking

On-campus parking for WISE students includes any areas/spots designated with RED parking signs and arrows. These are the same spots designated for faculty and staff. There are handicapped parking spots in all parking areas. WISE members have some complaints about the availability of parking spots but, for the most part, it is possible to park and get to class on time if you allow some extra time to find a spot. Sometimes this means walking across the quad or along a roadway to get to Kennedy Hall or Plourde Recreation Center.

College Student ID Cards with Picture

Assumption College picture student IDs are valuable to many WISE members who wish to eat lunch in Taylor Hall Dining Room. With an Assumption student ID lunches are half-price (\$6.35). The ID is necessary for getting into the college library and for obtaining a discount at Plourde Recreation Center.

WISE members report they have used the student ID to get discounted rates in museums and events in the United States and while traveling abroad. Many of these facilities recognize lifelong learning programs and non-traditional students.

The student IDs can be obtained in the Campus Police/Public Safety Office after 2:00 pm on a WISE class day. Your picture will be taken for the ID.

Weather Announcements

Class cancellations due to inclement weather are announced via a membership-wide email and on the WISE Office voicemail: 508-767-7513. Please note that WISE does not hold classes when Assumption College is closed for a weather event. Class cancellations are determined by the Director, President, and Curriculum Chair by 7:00 am at which time an email is sent to all members. Check your WISE email to learn about class cancellations.

Although rare in occurrence, courses may be cancelled due to low enrollment or other unusual circumstances. Communication of such circumstances will be relayed via email or phone by a representative of WISE.

Class Locations

On Campus

Kennedy Hall, Room 119

Plourde Recreation Center, Conference Room

Off Campus

The Willows of Worcester

101 Barry Road

Worcester, MA 01609

Southgate Retirement Community

30 Julio Drive

Shrewsbury, MA 01545

Briarwood Community Center

65 Briarwood Circle

Worcester, MA 01604

Worcester Jewish Community Center

633 Salisbury Street

Worcester, MA 01609

Worcester Art Museum (WAM)

55 Salisbury Street

Worcester, MA 01609

Mass Audubon Broad Meadow Brook Conservation Center and Wildlife Sanctuary

414 Massasoit Road

Worcester, MA 01604

Tower Hill Botanic Garden

11 French Drive

Boylston, MA 01505

WISE COURSE EXPECTATIONS

WISE courses are taught by Group Leaders who submit course proposals to the Curriculum Committee. The members of the Curriculum Committee carefully screen all proposals and each semester develop a roster of courses to be presented in the two five-week sessions. The number of course offerings has increased with the number of WISE members, so we now offer approximately 80 courses per year in a wide variety of subjects taught by talented and dedicated Group Leaders. At the end of the five-weeks course evaluations are collected in each course and reviewed by the Curriculum Committee. At WISE we take pride in the excellence of our course offerings.

We find that Group Leaders appeal to different members of WISE in terms of subject matter, teaching style, and size of the class. Sometimes it is best to take others' comments about Group Leaders lightly and wait to make your own determination. We all have different learning needs and styles. Another opportunity at WISE is to take a course in a subject you know nothing about or have never thought you would like. Sometimes these courses turn out to be among the best you have taken.

Whatever courses you register for the format is somewhat the same:

- courses meet for five weeks, an hour and a half each week
- each class begins with an introduction from the Class Assistant
- the Course Catalog lists the required and/or optional books for the course
- some classes require reading/preparation for the first class as listed in the Course Catalog
- at the beginning of the first class or even via email prior to class you will receive the course syllabus
- required reading assignments will be listed on the syllabus on a week-by week basis
- WISE courses have no tests or papers

Each course varies in the style of presentation. Some Group Leaders are lecture-based and some are discussion-based. Those that are lecture-based may allow questions during the lecture or at the end of each class. Discussion leaders may or may not call on people but work with comments and points the members of the class add to the discussion

It is important to follow some guidelines in class behavior:

- do not monopolize a class discussion by constantly asking questions and/or adding personal comments
- do not talk to your neighbors during class as this is very disturbing for other members in the room
- listen to the comments and questions of your peers

WISE Special Interest Groups and Clubs

The **Special Interest Groups (SIGs)** focus on a specific subject matter. They are led by an expert in the field and coordinated by a WISE member and WISE office staff. The SIGs complement courses but are more informal, self-directed, and may involve outside experts and activists in the subject matter. SIGs meet monthly during WISE semesters.

Supreme Court Special Interest Group facilitated by Jack Ross and Joe Corn

This group focuses on a series of Supreme Court decisions that have been recently or currently handed down. Jack Ross, a WISE Group Leader with extensive legal training and background, facilitates the discussion and supplies background information for each case.

Energy and the Environment Special Interest Group facilitated by Pete Murphy and Michael Fishbein

In this SIG the focus is on energy production and the effect on the climate and environment. Under the expertise of Pete Murphy, the members of the SIF discuss public policy about energy production, use, and conservation, now and in the future to protect the environment.

The **Clubs** provide stimulation as well as social interaction around shared activities for interested WISE members. Volunteers coordinate club related events with support of the WISE staff.

Movie Club organized by Bobbi Corn

Periodically throughout the year the Movie Club meets to see movies at Cinema North in Worcester, here at the college in Kennedy Hall, or at other venues in the city. Announcements are made about the movies well in advance. There is a discussion of the movie afterwards.

Baseball Club organized by Joe Corn

One or two times during the summer WISE members reserve a block of tickets to watch the Worcester Bravehearts, a summer collegiate team, play at Hanover Insurance Park located at 1 College Square by The College of the Holy Cross.

Book Club organized by Joyce Abdow-Dowd

Five times during the year members of the Book Club meet to discuss books selected by a committee of WISE members. The books include contemporary, classic and historical fiction, memoirs, and other nonfiction. Each book discussion is led by a WISE member with contributions from all the members

WISE Writing Workshop organized by Mariam Karis Cronin

This club is for members interested in honing their writing skills in a collaborative and supportive workshop setting that meets once a month to share individual writings and learn elements of writing.

WISE welcomes the formation of new clubs based on membership interests. If you are interested in starting a WISE club, please contact the WISE office.

Officers, Committee Chairs & Council Members

Executive Officers

President: Baltej Maini

Vice President: TBA

Secretary: Donna Crocker

Treasurer: Sue Tellier

Committee Chairs

Curriculum: Barbara Groves

Finance: Sue Tellier

Special Events: Ann (Cookie) Nelson

Communications: Karl Hakkarainen

Nominations: Zelda Schwartz

WISE Council Members at Large

Joyce Abdow-Dowd

Patricia Hertzfeld

Ron Crocker

Ginny McNamara

Mariam Cronin

Cathy Samko

Michael Fishbein

Coordinators

Class Assistants: Bobbi Corn

New Member Orientation: Kathy Drew

Course Evaluations: Jane Gilligan

Technical Advisor: Karl Hakkarainen

Special Interest Groups: Michael Fishbein

WISE Staff

WISE Director: Susan Perschbacher, PhD

WISE Office Manager: Jill Lagana, MEd

WISE Volunteer Committees

WISE is a volunteer-led and run organization. Two paid staff members coordinate the WISE Office; offer support for WISE Members and Program activities; work with Assumption College faculty, students, and staff; and reach out to the greater Worcester community. The WISE Program depends on the talent of volunteers to guide, develop and manage the WISE Program.

Please inform an officer of WISE, a member of the WISE Council, or someone in the WISE Office if you are interested in volunteering for a committee.

The **WISE Council** is the WISE policy-making body. Chaired by the President, it is comprised of the Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Members-at-large, and all Committee Chairs. The WISE Director and President Emeritus also sit on the Council as non-voting members. Officers and members are nominated by the Nominating Committee and voted in by WISE members at the Annual Meeting. Among the Council's responsibilities are maintaining the fiscal health of the organization; approving curricular and programmatic changes; and supporting the relationship with Assumption College and the greater Worcester community. Meetings are monthly except in January, June, July, and August. Each meeting includes reports from committee chairs and a thorough review of the financial status. All new programmatic proposals are first brought up and discussed in the Council.

The **Curriculum Committee** recruits and approves Group Leaders, reviews and approves course proposals, approves the semester calendar, and works with the WISE office staff to prepare the course catalog. Evaluations of all courses and instructors are ongoing functions of this committee.

The **Communications Committee** works to ensure that members and others in the central Massachusetts area are informed about WISE activities. The members of the committee provide content for WISE communications, produce regular newsletters, and coordinate WISE-related content for social media and the WISE website.

The **Finance Committee** creates the annual WISE budget and monitors, evaluates and recommends changes to expenditures and operating procedures.

The **Special Events Committee** is responsible for coordinating and hosting extracurricular activities which include Brown Bag Lectures, trips to museums and historical sites, the holiday luncheon, Worcester Night Out and the Annual Membership Meeting.

Class Assistants are the connection between the Group Leader (instructor), the students (WISE members), and WISE Administration. The Class Assistant's role includes creating a welcoming environment in class, making announcements, keeping attendance records, and handling the class evaluation process.

We Are WISE -- A History Of WISE

Thelma Lockwood, Founding Member of WISE

In 1992, I, with six friends and colleagues from the social service community, all retired within a two-year period: **Jean Griesheimer, Marijane Jones, Shirley Weinstein, Maddie Levine, Hy Cohen, Betty McGrath**, and myself were newly coming into a world of no high-pressure demands and no focus. We were, relatively young, healthy, talented and with expertise in our individual fields. What would we do with undemanding time stretching out before us?

Spurred on by Maddie Levine and Shirley Weinstein, we held an initial brainstorming session. After several meetings, a plan began to emerge. Recently returned from an Elderhostel program I had learned about the newly developing Elderhostel Institute Network, a program of Elderhostel courses similar to the national program of continuing education through peer-learning, and courses would be held in colleges in the community.

In a serendipitous turn of events, **Charlene Martin**, then Assistant Dean of Continuing Education at Assumption College, had recently returned from a national conference on programs for senior citizens interested in lifelong learning. As we approached local colleges to see if they were interested in collaborating with us to develop the Elderhostel Institute plan in Worcester, Charlene stepped forward and offered the opportunity to hold an Open House at Assumption to introduce the concept to the community. We were looking for a college connection and Assumption was looking for a target population. To quote Dr. Al Charney, one of our earliest members, "This was a marriage made in Heaven." Assumption offered us classroom space without charge and, thus, the marriage contract was signed.

With organizational help from Jim Verschueren, Director of an Elderhostel Institute Network in New Hampshire, and Bill Densmore of the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, we advertised an "open house" to introduce our program. This was a "word of mouth" operation with handwritten notices in supermarkets and announcements in churches and synagogues. To our amazement, more than 300 people came to an overflow audience in La Maison Auditorium. Over 100 individuals signed up for the first semester. In our first year, we offered eight courses.

Since this was a peer learning concept, the members were expected to be the group leaders. One of our earliest members, Hannah Laipson, a retired Professor of English, offered a course on the comparison of Shakespeare's "King Lear" with Jane Smiley's newly released "A Thousand Acres." It did not take long for Hannah's courses to develop a fan club similar to today's "groupies," for example Margaret Watson and Bill O'Brien. New courses were developed along the way in areas of history, science, politics, and religion, among others. Worcester is the home of many colleges with retired professors looking for continued activity, so we "lucked out," acquiring a superb and unequaled faculty.

The name for WISE was chosen as the winning entry in a contest. When the suggestion of the WORCESTER INSTITUTE for SENIOR EDUCATION, with its acronym WISE and an owl logo, was put forth, it was a "no brainer." WISE we were.



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