



Think
and Grow

RICH

Our city's institutions of higher learning offer pathways to success to Durhamites of all ages

By Amanda MacLaren
Photography by Briana Brough

College isn't just for the fresh-out-of-high-school. Durham is home to four institutions – **The Art Institute of Raleigh-Durham, Durham Technical Community College, Duke and N.C. Central** – that excel at helping folks advance their careers or just expand their minds.

Never too late

Pasha Lemnah, a new student at The Art Institute of Raleigh-Durham, is pursuing a dream she has had since she was 7-years-old. She is studying to get her bachelor's degree in photography despite already having two other degrees, one in fashion merchandising and another in nursing. She works full-time as a nurse and also takes care of her mother, who had a stroke several years ago.

"My studying time doesn't come easy, but I love the atmosphere, I love being in Durham," Pasha says. "The whole idea of being able to get a bachelor's degree in something that I have a

■ Pasha Lemnah is following her dream of being a photographer



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passion for is a new concept to me, sort of like a whole new life.”

Having only been open since 2008 and with roughly 30 graduates thus far, the Art Institute is the new kid on the block when it comes to continuing education. Most of the student body is similar to that of a traditional college, many having just graduated from high school. But the school does cater to career-changers and people who want to advance the education they already have.

The Art Institute’s dean of academic affairs, **Derek Rhodarmer**, says the school strives to serve those people who may have changed their minds mid-career or have been involved in an industry that might have shrunk due to the economic downturn. By offering top-quality faculty and facilities and “making sure that we’re not falling behind in any kind of development in the artistic discipline or culinary industry,” Derek believes the Art Institute stands apart from other colleges. The school and the community of Durham met Pasha’s needs, and she hopes that others will be able to do the same.

“Anybody who feels they are at a dead end, they can search their soul, find their dream and go after it. This city has everything that you could possibly want to make a change in your life,” she says.



‘You can do it’

After working in customer service for more than 28 years, **Sheila Slade** found herself up against a road block. She came home to unemployment and 70 acres of what was once a 200-acre working tobacco farm. Due to changes in the economy and new government regulations, most of the land had to be sold.

One of Sheila’s friends, who also was unemployed, told her about a program at Durham Tech, a class titled “Intro to Health Care Careers.”

Sue Jackson, executive dean of continuing education at Durham Tech, says that often the school will have students who have been laid off, especially during these economic times. “They are looking either for retooling, a new career path, or they want to update their current skill set as they prepare to re-enter the workforce,” Sue says.

For Sheila, the most influential experience during her time at Durham Tech was with one of her instructors, **J’Nai Willingham**. J’Nai convinced Sheila to pursue a Health Unit Coordinator/Certified Nursing Assistant track, from which Sheila graduated and was then hired by the **UNC Cancer Center** last year.

“I’m thankful to DTC for my new career, but I give credit for my success to J’Nai, who was always there for me, cheering me on and pushing me to keep going,” Sheila says. “Her favorite saying is ‘You can do it!’ I still hear her saying that every time I start to doubt myself.”

Neighborly advice

Pat Bogart was only a few months from retirement when a brochure appeared in her mailbox one day. It was advertising a trip to South Africa through the **Osher Lifelong Learning Institute**, a Duke University Continuing Studies program. On the front of the brochure was a handwritten note that read, “Why don’t you think about this?”

The brochure was dropped there by Pat’s neighbor, **Sara**

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Craven, then the director of the Osher program, or OLLI, as members call it. Although Pat had never thought about traveling to Africa before, she took the class, traveled to Botswana and South Africa, and has now been involved in the program for almost five years. She has taken classes on topics ranging from Eleanor Roosevelt to ethics to how pharmaceutical drugs work in the body. “It opened a whole new door about retirement,” she says.

Pat is one of nearly 1,700 members of the Osher Institute, itself only one of the five programs offered by Duke University’s Continuing Studies. When CNN Money voted Durham as the best place in the country to retire last year, much of the credit went to the program. “I think one of our greatest strengths is that we truly do peer learning; these are peers teaching peers,” says **Dr. Garry Crites**, director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. “In some cases we do bring in professors



Our story continues here..



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and so forth, but the typical classroom consists of an OLLI member that is teaching other OLLI members.”

Pat doesn't plan on stopping her courses at OLLI and says she can't imagine not being involved with the program in some way. "I think that one of the things that's important when you retire is that you have communities that you're involved with, and it certainly provides me with one of those communities," she says. "It's much more than just courses, it's the interaction that people find valuable."

All things being equal

The people working in the **Division of Extended Studies** at North Carolina Central University believe a Central student is a Central student is a Central student. End of story.

Clayton Mack, special projects coordinator in the Division of Extended Studies, says the school takes pride in offering the same high quality education to anyone, whether they're a traditional student, taking courses online or furthering their education with a class or two. A student will have the same experience in one of the nearly 200 online classes as a regular on-campus student, as much as can be simulated in an online environment. "We try to find a balance there," Clayton says. "Where we can be sensitive to the needs of nontraditional students, but also don't lose sight of the NCCU experience overall."

In addition to the online programs, continuing education at NCCU has face-to-face courses that are usually offered as workshops. Eight evening and weekend degree programs offer a benefit to working adults as the departments hosting the programs are committed to holding classes after 4pm on weekdays and on Saturday when necessary. **DM**

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