

Science for politically active Seniors

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The OSHA Life Long Learning Institute is a national organization that provides classes for people aged 55 and older. Many in this age group are politically active; they vote, write to their congressional representatives, and often have considerable community influence. Unfortunately, many have a very negative view of science and scientists. This stems from a lack of knowledge of science and a poor understanding of its methods, and also from an impression that scientists are arrogant and uninterested in their concerns. A class in any science will attract few of these people, but a class in SETI (I have given many) always attracts a large audience. Giving such a class provides a rare opportunity to correct the negative impressions and show something of the beauty and excitement of real science. To do that, however, one must be willing to answer, in a non-judgmental and conversational way, the questions many of this group have about possible extra-terrestrial societies. A serious discussion of SETI, in particular, illustrates the stark contrast between real science and the fanciful pseudoscience so prevalent today.