

## PLATO BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Friday, October 17, 2014 - 9:30 a.m.

DCS Office, 21 North Park, Madison, WI

Present: Mary Boyd - Chair, Patricia Becker, Bob Blitzke, Lauren Blough, Lewis Bosworth, Mary DeWolf, Mike DiIorio, Gail Gordon, Aleta Murray, Scott Kolar, Tim Otis, Frank Power, Don Reeder  
DCS: Barry Orton  
Guests: Emily Auerbach, Greg Bell

**I. CALL TO ORDER** – Mary Boyd called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m. and introduced guests UW Professor Emily Auerbach, Odyssey Project Director, and Greg Bell from the Membership Committee who will make presentations.

**II. MINUTES** – Correction: “DeIorio” on page 2 should be DiIorio. Aleta Murray made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 19, 2014 Board Meeting with the correction and Patricia Becker seconded it. The motion was passed unanimously.

**III. PRESIDENT’S REPORT** – Mary Boyd

A. Construction has begun on the workspace, located behind Louise’s cubicle, which will become the PLATO office.

B. Mary Boyd contributed comments gathered from various PLATO Committee representatives and submitted them to Laura Ingram for Louise Fowler’s probationary review. All said they were very satisfied with Louise’s work.

C. The first batch of PLATO membership cards was mailed. We received a new supply of card stock and the remaining cards have been printed and will be distributed.

**IV. GUEST REPORTS**

A. Professor Emily Auerbach, Director of the Odyssey Project, was introduced by Tim Otis who noted that the program had been supported by PLATO in the past. People think highly of the Odyssey Project and some have suggested that we support it with PLATO scholarship funds. Fund Development asked Barry Orton to invite Emily to address the Board. Emily outlined the Project:

1. 30 students are admitted each year for a two semester free Humanities course to give them a jump start to a college education.

2. The participants must be at least 18 yrs old and at or near poverty level.

3. The Humanities course covers topics such as literature, theater and philosophy and the students earn six UW college credits in English literature. The program does

not have a math and science component but students can get assistance from tutors in math, science and foreign language.

4. The annual cost of about \$4,200.00 per student includes staffing, tuition, books, and childcare but also provides some food and transportation assistance.
5. The project is modeled after the New York Clemente Course at Bard College and is similar to the Berea College program in Kentucky, both of which provide assistance to people who cannot afford the cost of higher education.
6. Contributions range from \$10.00 to \$10,000.00 and organizations support, for example, an Alliant Energy student and five Evjue students.
7. The annual budget is \$280,000.00 and 50% of that goes to alumni of the Odyssey Project to help those who need additional aid to finish college.
8. Success can be measured in several ways. Although the participants face challenges with drugs, alcohol and domestic abuse, almost all of them graduate. 16 Odyssey graduates have gone on to get bachelor's degrees and four have master's degrees. Another is a barber who decorated his shop with pictures of famous African Americans and turned it into a cultural hub where discussion is fostered. Graduates get more involved as citizens. The YWCA gave one Latina graduate their Women of Distinction award. There are currently four students enrolled in Masters Programs in Social Work. Some are presenting their essays on "Why Vote?" at a community event at the Madison Central Library on October 26<sup>th</sup>.
9. There are 90 to 100 applicants annually for the 30 spaces. Student selection is based on the selectors' judgment of whether or not the program could make a transformative difference in the applicants' lives.
10. Classes are usually 90% African American, 5% Hispanic and 5% Other, but this year there are eight Hispanic students or 27% of the class.

Discussion centered on whether PLATO a) has the funds to support the Odyssey Project, and b) whether there is enough to maintain the scholarships PLATO currently supports with the addition of a contribution to the Odyssey Project. Tim Otis noted that the PLATO Fund totals about \$125,000.00 to \$130,000.00 and guidelines exist for the allocation of scholarships. Maybe we could sponsor a student at the \$4,200.00 level, the annual program cost for one person. **MOTION:** Don Reeder made a motion for PLATO to set a goal of supporting one student at whatever the total annual Odyssey Project cost is, or however much PLATO can provide toward the Project cost, based on a recommendation made to the Board by the PLATO Fund Development Committee. The motion carried with one objection by Frank Power who thought it was premature to set an amount to be allocated.

- B. Greg Bell has been researching ways to foster diversity in PLATO membership and activities. In 2010 Dane County's Black population numbered 31,300 or about 6.5% of

the population. Greg referenced the document *Race to Equity* by Erica Nelson and mentioned Reverend Alex Gee who made a statement about why Madison is failing its African American community. Greg spent months contacting several people in the African American community in an attempt to open a discussion and ask for their recommendations on how to provide courses that might benefit the Black community. Many calls were not returned and Rev. Alex Gee said he was not interested. Among the others contacted were: Betty Banks, co-author of *Stoney the Road*, and Richard Harris, author of *Growing up Black in South Madison*, Tim Kehl from the Wisdom Project, Muriel Simms Lincoln School Principal, John Strasser Alderman in District 14, and the Urban League. Greg met with Muriel Simms and Betty Banks and invited them to coordinate a PLATO course but they suggested he should coordinate it. They noted that some organizations come in to the community and take over. They don't give the Black leaders leadership roles. He also met with Professor Emily Auerbach who said that PLATO isn't known in and doesn't resonate with the Black community. Board suggestions were to include other people of color, Asians and Hispanics, in the search for diversity and also to take small steps to gain trust with groups who are disaffected. Maybe a course could be offered at the Multicultural Center. Bob Blitzke suggested that lectures rather than courses might be the way to attract and involve people of color. The discussion will continue next month with input from Committee representatives.

#### **V. TREASURER'S REPORT – Tim Otis**

Tim Otis reported that he will meet with the accounting firm to prepare PLATO's Federal tax return, Form 990, which has to be filed by mid-November. Gail Gordon has done most of the work so the consultation should be short.

#### **VI. DCS REPORT – Barry Orton**

Barry Orton reported that the demolition of the PLATO workspace has begun and the air-handling system has been re-positioned. Delivery of the new walls is scheduled for the end of October and the guesstimate for completion by the end of December is about right. There will be floor-to-ceiling walls and a sliding door to save space. Board volunteers are handling U S mail and voice mail while Louise is on vacation from October 13th – 22<sup>nd</sup>.

#### **VII. ACTION/DISCUSSION ITEMS**

##### **A. Long Range Plan-Review of Mission, Values, Goals – Frank Power**

Frank will make a presentation to the Board at the November meeting. He noted that there has been a drift from the vision statement since 2010 to the "About PLATO" wording. Frank would like to get back to the 2010 mission and vision. Mary Boyd also noted that the MOA does not reflect some of the changes which have occurred in PLATO activities. Mike DiIorio will not be available for some of the meetings to review the Strategic Plan/Long Range Plan so Mary asked for another volunteer. Scott Kolar will serve on the committee which includes Frank Power, Don Reeder, Patricia Becker, Mary DeWolf, Mike DiIorio (when he is available) and Mary Boyd (ex officio).

B. Holiday Luncheon – Frank Power

The Board Holiday Luncheon will take place at Biaggi's from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 15 people plan to attend.

C. Senior Guest Auditor Group – Gail Gordon

Gail would like to create an interest group and use part of the PLATO website for a communication network for Senior Guest Auditors. Barry Orton agreed to send out email messages to the UW auditors to alert them to web posting(s). They would likely be interested in PLATO, too, and the goal would be to get them to join. Mary DeWolf noted that promotion could be problematic if classes are filling up at the current level of membership. Lauren Blough pointed out that most of the courses that were declared "closed" at the Preview are not even full according to the class rosters that she is receiving from the Coordinators. Gail said the auditors are already actively participating in education but PLATO could offer a social network. Barry said there are 250 to 400 per semester. Gail pictures a separate page on the web site that she would maintain. In addition to the DCS mailing(s), Scott suggested that there could be a link on the DCS website that would alert auditors who are not PLATO members to the new PLATO webpage. Nonmembers will not be added to the PLATO mailing list. **MOTION:** Gail Gordon made a motion to permit the Senior Guest Auditor Interest Group to use space on the PLATO website to create networking opportunities. Frank Power seconded it and the motion passed unanimously. Bob Blitzke suggested that the PLATO website needs more organizing that should be completed before we take on another task. Scott Kolar said establishing this page is trivial and won't affect progress on other jobs. Gail was asked to come back to the Board at a future meeting with a proposal for the webpage setup.

## VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Communications – Gail Gordon/Scott Kolar

The functionality of Wild Apricot is preferred to Word Press as it is easier to update and maintain and simpler for members to use. The website functions will be converted to Wild Apricot with an expected completion date in early November. Following the consolidation content will be added to the pages.

B. Curriculum – Lewis Bosworth

Lewis will email the minutes from the October Curriculum Committee meeting to Board members.

C. Fund Development – Tim Otis

The committee had planned to send out the request for donations in September but decided to wait until the end of the year. Support is modest this year compared to last year.

D. Membership – Mary DeWolf

1. Mary DeWolf reported that Membership staffed a table at the Institute on Aging Colloquium on September 30<sup>th</sup>. It was very busy and they received a letter inviting them back next year. Membership will also have a table at the Alzheimer's Annual Lecture and Resource Fair on November 4<sup>th</sup>.
2. The PLATO membership cards are available and extras will be kept Louise's cubicle. Some people have filled out the form online but have not sent in their payment. Membership follows up with an email/letter. It was decided that if payment is not received within a specified time, then the person's name should be removed from the mailing list. The letter should notify the registrant of this. When they complete the form online it makes them "active" members. Scott Kolar said the system can be set up to send a warning letter and then remove those who haven't paid after a set amount of time.
3. Mary DeWolf will be gone in November. The Committee will meet in January to discuss the Spring Preview.

E. Special Events – Bob Blitzke

Bob said to watch the Special Events Monday News Briefings email for updates.

**IX. OTHER REPORTS**

Agora – Patricia Becker

Patricia reported that there are 12 active members on the editorial board with three others on call. The invitation to send submissions has been mailed and one request for information has been received. The group is working on funding. The Board included \$2,000 for the Agora in this year's budget and an additional \$2,000 in next year's budget. They are hoping to raise some additional funds from sponsors.

**X. ADJOURNMENT /NEXT MEETING**

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m. Next meeting is Friday, November 21, 2014 9:30 a.m. at DCS - 21 N. Park, Room 7045.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lauren Blough

*Approved by the PLATO Board on November 21, 2014.*