

# PLATO PERSIMMON

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## A Letter from the Dean *by Jeffrey S. Russell*



As UW-Madison's new Dean of Continuing Studies and Vice Provost for Lifelong Learning, I'm looking forward to discovering the best ways we can

continue to serve our expanding population of senior learners. In the meantime, I would like to tell you about my educational background and vision for lifelong learning in our community.

I was fortunate enough to grow up in a family that placed equal value on hard work and education. My father ran the field operations for a small regional contractor in Alliance, Ohio. The oldest of five children, I was learning about the construction business from an early age while also helping my mother, who ran a summer camp for children with disabilities. My wife, Vicki, and I have in turn sought to instill the values of work, education, and service in our five children, all of whom have paid or will pay their own college tuition.

After graduating from the University of Cincinnati School of Engineering—the oldest cooperative-learning program for undergraduate engineering students in the country—I completed my master's degree and PhD at Purdue and then came to teach in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering here at UW-Madison. For the last seven of my 22 years of teaching I also served as departmental chair. I became Dean of Continuing Studies this past August. One reason that I feel proud and grateful to be in my new position is that I find

my own values reflected in the spirit of inquiry, responsibility, and independent thought that characterize both PLATO and Continuing Studies. And I am increasingly impressed both by the growth in PLATO's numbers and by the expanding vision of its members and leaders.

In a quarter of a century, PLATO's membership has grown from fewer than 50 people to more than 900; more than half of that growth took place in just the last five years. With Dane County's 60+ population projected to double in the next decade, PLATO faces unprecedented challenges in meeting its vision to "provide high-quality learning, teaching, and social opportunities to the Dane County senior community in close cooperation with the University of Wisconsin-Madison."

But PLATO also has a large number of opportunities. With a reorganized board of directors, enhanced website and other improvements in outreach, and programming that incorporates innovative delivery systems and new settings and times for classes, PLATO is uniquely positioned to satisfy the continuously increasing interest in learning throughout the Madison area. Its leaders have done, and continue to do, a remarkable job of positioning the organization for growth in this exciting time.

PLATO's recently developed Strategic Action Plan, which outlines the innovations described above as well as other equally important ones, will help guide

the organization halfway through the coming decade. Here in Continuing Studies we're in the midst of our own extensive process of information-gathering, self-assessment, and planning to ensure that we can flourish in the face of reduced resources. Our ultimate goal is to enhance and expand educational opportunities for every learner. Our connection with PLATO—whose core values include "maintain[ing] a vigorous and creative member-driven organization... in close coordination with the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies"—is an important element in achieving that goal.

For a quarter of a century, PLATO and UW-Madison have maintained a very fruitful relationship—and we still have much to learn from each other!

### Spring Preview

**Save the date!** PLATO's 2012 Spring Preview will be held **Wednesday, Feb. 15, from 1:30-3 pm** at the downtown Madison Senior Center, 330 W. Mifflin St. You'll hear a short summary of what's in store for each class in our spring class line-up. PLATO volunteers will be on hand at the Preview to accept new memberships. Join us for this opportunity to see your PLATO friends and colleagues and meet new people.

See the spring 2012 Course Schedule in this issue and course descriptions. Please call or email the class coordinator to sign up for those classes that request pre-registration.



*With support from Continuing Studies at UW-Madison*

21 N. Park St., 7th Fl., Madison, WI 53715-1218 • 608-262-5823 • plato-slp@dcs.wisc.edu • www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu

## New Course Update

PLATO is alive with new courses this year; there were three in fall, two new offerings in the interim (January-February), and two are planned for the spring semester.

### Fall Semester 2011

Daryl Sherman, coordinator of Refighting the Civil War, led two introductory discussions about the background, causes, and the East-West theaters of the war. The group then decided to focus on Vicksburg. This campaign is considered to be one of the most brilliant of the war. Grant's success in this battle was a major contributing factor to his appointment as General-in-Chief of the Union armies. Participation in the class was obviously enthusiastic, as the class is tentatively planning a bus tour to Vicksburg with stops at other Civil War sites along the way. All interested PLATO members will be invited to join the tour, which should take place in March or April of 2012.

Tim Otis, coordinator of Our Country's History and Culture: 1945-Present, says that the class participants have accomplished a great deal. So far they have looked at key events that occurred after WWII: the Cold War, the bomb, the red scare, Korea, and stages of the Civil Rights movement. Class members have many rich experiences from this era, so the discussions are lively and pertinent. No doubt discussions will become more intense during the spring semester with the focus on the '60s and '70s and the profound changes that occurred during this time.

Grethe Brix-Leer leads Women's Journey toward Self Discovery: A Writing Workshop. During the first semester, class participants were able to use writing to clarify their view of themselves, helped along by a supportive group of other women. Honest self-discovery and the writing process itself can be daunting, but gentle guidance in a comfortable setting makes the process easier and very rewarding.

### Interim 2012

Norm Leer coordinates a course entitled A Sampling of Roots Music. The three-session class will run from 1:30-3:30 pm on Jan. 10, 17 and 24.

Maurice Better will be coordinating Fictional Detectives: Police and Private, beginning on Wednesday, Jan. 18. The five-week class will run from 10 am to Noon.

### Spring 2012

Bugs, Beetles, and Bipeds: Insects and Human Culture will be coordinated by Walt Goodman and Phil Pelitteri. This class will take place on Thursdays from 9-11 am.

My Favorite Philosophers will be coordinated by Mel Siedband.

The Continued Search for Meaning: Presenting the First Issue of *The Agora* will be coordinated by Fred Blancke, Vaunceil Kruse, and Edna Canfield.

## The Agora, Volume 2

by Vaunceil Kruse

As we approach the deadline for submissions for volume 2 of *The Agora*, the Editorial Board would like to thank the entire PLATO community for the wonderfully positive reception given to the first issue. We look forward to this year's submissions and expect to find many interesting and inspiring works from even more PLATO members.

The Editorial Board welcomed new member Phil Paulson, as Winifred Batson, Marv Beatty, and Fred Ross went on to other PLATO responsibilities. Vaunceil Kruse continues as Editor-in-Chief, Edna Canfield as Managing Editor, with Lauren Blough, Ellen Last, and Claudia Melrose continuing their editorial duties.

We look forward, with the competent assistance of Wendy Kerr and Christina Finet of UW-Madison Continuing Studies, to publishing *The Agora Volume 2* this September.

## Special Events and Activities Committee

The PLATO website ([www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu](http://www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu)) is the place to go to keep current with special events and activities.

The Special Events and Activities Committee, which is responsible for planning hospitality for PLATO previews as well as lectures, travel programs, and social events, would love to welcome new members. Mary Boyd, the current chair, is hoping that people new to PLATO, as well as current members, will share their interests and ideas to expand the number of events offered. As always, the committee wants to include a wide variety of activities. "We are a friendly, collaborative group," says Mary, whose contact information is [boydma2322@sbcglobal.net](mailto:boydma2322@sbcglobal.net).

Recent events include three bus trips—to the Anderson Japanese Gardens in June, the Green Bay Packer Hall of Fame in July and the Milwaukee Art Museum in November. In addition, the committee held two lectures in the fall of 2011, one on Madison's history by David Mollenhoff and one on the new health care law with Dr. Eugene Farley. This past spring and summer a lecture, a tour, and a tasting of harvest vegetables conducted by the University Research Station on Mineral Point Road were offered. The range of events is only limited by the knowledge and interests of our membership, so we are always looking for additional members to bring forward new ideas for day trips, lectures, and special events. Lack of experience is not a problem. The committee will train and accompany new leaders interested in planning special events.

Don't forget to keep checking the PLATO website and weekly email announcements for upcoming lectures and other special events!

## PLATO Website Update

by Scott Kolar

The redesign of the PLATO website is complete. Check it out at [www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato](http://www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato) or do a Google search for "PLATO UW-Madison." The new design provides easier navigation, more information, and a distinct PLATO area. It achieves the Strategic Action Plan's goal of establishing the website as PLATO's "medium of choice for the organization's communications." The Website Taskforce has completed its job and the Communication and Membership Committee will now maintain the website.

### Here are some of the changes:

Almost every page has been reworked to provide more information. Clicking on the course name on the course schedule page displays the course description. Clicking on the course meeting place displays a map of the location. Other information, such as the course outline, may also be available. There is easy access to a list of special events offered by PLATO and Senior Learning. On the Organization page you will find pages for the Board of Directors and committees that list their functions. You will also find important organizational documents such as the bylaws, budgets, and the Strategic Action Plan. There is a Publications page where *The Agora* will be available in PDF format and you will find back issues of the *Persimmon*.

On the Membership page you can join or renew your membership online. It's fast, easy, safe, and secure. On the About Us page find out more about PLATO and its history. Have a question about PLATO? Then check out the new Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page to get your answers.

Having wrapped up the website redesign, the Communication and Membership Committee will start looking at ways we might use technology to advance our programming and streamline our administrative procedures. If you are interested in exploring how we might use different technologies, please consider joining the Communication and Membership Committee.

## "Orientation to PLATO"

November 2011

PLATO members interested in how our operating committees work met for an "Orientation to PLATO" on Tuesday, Nov. 1, at the Madison Senior Center. President Tim Otis gave a brief overview of PLATO's mission, vision, and core values, after which representatives from our Standing Committees (Communication and Membership, Curriculum, Special Events, and University Relations) talked about what these committees do. In addition, the coordinator of our newly designed website and the *The Agora* literary journal editor gave brief descriptions of their work.

In PLATO we take participation seriously. Indeed, we depend on many members being willing to participate beyond attending classes and events. Turnover on the committees is encouraged, as we don't expect people to serve multi-year appointments (unless, of course, they want to). The key to the success of PLATO is the curriculum of 40-some courses and the coordinators who manage them. PLATO is made possible by members of the four standing committees, who provide the essential leadership and person power. For an overview of what these groups do and how you can add your skills to help keep your favorite PLATO activities going, contact the Leadership Committee Chair, Patricia Becker ([ptbecker@wisc.edu](mailto:ptbecker@wisc.edu), 608-833-5799).

## PLATO Chorus

**Wanted:** Piano accompanist to join 23 enthusiastic singers on Mondays from 1:30-3 pm. Please call Nancy Wynn at 608-441-1446 if interested.

## Inter-session Lectures

After the holidays and before the spring session begins, join us for one or both of these lecture events.

**Friday, Jan 20:** Former Director of the LaFollette School of Public Affairs and Professor Emeritus Dennis Dresang will present an objective, informational lecture on Wisconsin's Recall Process. Time will be provided for your questions. Free. Location: Oakwood Retirement Community Theater, Mineral Point Rd, 1-2 pm.

**Tuesday, Jan 31:** Professor Joe Elder will present a lecture entitled, *The Muslim-Jewish-Christian Heritage*. Joe Elder is a professor of sociology known for his expertise on the culture, politics, and history of Asia and the Middle East. Time will be provided for your questions. Free. Location: Oakwood Retirement Community Theater on Mineral Point Rd, 3:30-4:30 pm.

To register: Contact Wendy at the PLATO office (262-5823) or email her at [plato-slp@dcs.wisc.edu](mailto:plato-slp@dcs.wisc.edu).

### Cleopatra Exhibit Bus Trip

Mark your calendars now for Saturday, March 31. We'll visit the Cleopatra Exhibit at the Milwaukee Public Museum. See the flyer enclosed with this *Persimmon* for registration information.

### Spring Luncheon Date Set

The PLATO Spring Luncheon, held annually to celebrate a successful year of learning and camaraderie, will take place on Thursday, May 17, 2012 at the Sheraton Hotel on John Nolan Drive. Watch for more information later in 2012.

## Broadening PLATO'S Financial Base

by Marv Beatty and Fred Ross

PLATO has a new two-pronged initiative underway. A committee appointed by the Board of Directors and including Tim Otis, Mike Lovejoy, Ann Falconer, Arden Trine, Fred Ross, and Marv Beatty is laying the groundwork for expanding and diversifying the revenues available to PLATO for both our day-to-day operations and the charitable giving we have been doing for the past half-dozen years.

Work is proceeding on two fronts:

(1) establishing and then growing a dedicated "PLATO Fund" within the UW-Madison Foundation; and (2) gaining recognition from the IRS as a charitable organization under section 501 (c) (3) of the tax code (currently the IRS recognizes PLATO as a nonprofit corporation under section 501(c)(7) of the code. If and when these initiatives are successfully completed, they can have a significant impact on PLATO and its members. With 501(c)(3) status, all or part of members' dues would become tax deductible, and additional tax-deductible donations, from both members and non-members, could be made directly to PLATO. Such a tax status would also make it possible for PLATO itself to apply for charitable grants. Establishing a dedicated PLATO fund in the UW Foundation will provide professional financial management of our accumulated reserve balances.

But is all this important news?

We think so. Once in place, these initiatives will make it possible for PLATO members and friends to make tax-deductible donations or bequests to the organization, thereby broadening the financial base to support ongoing and new activities, to increase our ability to fund scholarships to UW-Madison for disadvantaged students, and to maintain the low membership dues we now enjoy.

Our goal is to complete this work and have both initiatives up and running in 2012. You will be hearing and reading more about these initiatives in the future.

## The Times They are A-Changin'

by Tim Otis

While this is not 1963 and I am certainly not Bob Dylan, there are definitely a number of changes and innovations occurring in the Land of PLATO.

- A number of new and innovative courses are being offered by our members. (See the article in this issue of the *Persimmon* that highlights these new offerings.)
- The Special Events Committee continues to expand and enhance unique offerings that provide innovative enrichment opportunities. (See information about upcoming events elsewhere in this issue of the *Persimmon*.)
- Plans are well underway to implement a charitable giving initiative as part of the PLATO mission. (See the article in this issue of the *Persimmon*.)
- The website has been significantly updated and is an excellent source of information about PLATO. If you have not visited the site please take an opportunity to do so. Hopefully you will be impressed with the value of using this resource. [www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato](http://www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato)
- For the first time, starting with this issue of the *Persimmon*, members who have agreed will start receiving most communications only through electronic means. This marks a new beginning in the level of our electronic communications.
- Plans are well underway to hold a celebration to mark our 25th anniversary. Definite plans will be finalized within the next few months.

- The Leadership Development Committee has been actively recruiting members to get involved in the various committees that keep PLATO functioning. If you would like to participate contact any member of the board. (Names and emails are on the website.)
- *The Agora* Committee, after a very successful first year, has been actively soliciting submissions for a second volume. This is an excellent way for members to share their creativity.
- There are a number of other opportunities in the planning stage. These include: a training session on using the UW Library; training, both basic and advanced, on how to utilize the internet and the various applications available there; and partnering with other community organizations to provide quality educational/enrichment opportunities. Stay tuned over the next few months as these and other opportunities become available.

PLATO's relationship with UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies continues to flourish. The new dean (see his article in this issue of the *Persimmon*) has a strong vision to improve and expand the offerings available through Continuing Studies. We anticipate that PLATO will continue to benefit from this close relationship.

The strength of PLATO is that we continue to grow and change as we evolve. The creativity and involvement of our members keep us "forever young." Change is the one constant that keeps PLATO a vibrant and exciting learning environment.