

PLATO PERSIMMON

Volume XXVV, Number 10

January/February 2013

Celebrating our 25th Anniversary and Looking Ahead

by Tim Otis, PLATO President

This past fall PLATO celebrated 25 years of providing participatory learning opportunities for its members, with many of us gathering for an evening reception and reflecting on our history and growth. PLATO has certainly changed and expanded in these past 25 years, thanks in no small part to the leadership and contributions from numerous PLATO members, and the ongoing and generous support from UW-Madison Continuing Studies (DCS).

As we look forward, we can feel justifiably proud of the number and variety of activities offered by our members. Some of these are:

- 38 courses were offered each semester during 2012. 83 percent of our members regularly attended at least one course in the fall of 2012.
- There was a significant expansion in special events, which are very popular with our members, especially trips to museums and theaters.
- We implemented a fund development arm of PLATO which will result in significant increases in scholarship support for UW returning adult students.
- The 2nd Volume of the *Agora* was published, which included original contributions from 30 members.

We look forward to offering more opportunities for our members to learn and be involved in our community in the coming year. While PLATO continues to offer new and expanded opportunities for learning, and enjoys a strong base of committed volunteers, we are moving into a challenging period that will require some changes in how we function.

- Our growth in membership, as well as the expanded opportunities offered to our members, are beginning to strain the administrative support provided by DCS. We are needing and expecting more support at a time when DCS has increasingly limited resources to respond. PLATO may, in the future, need to take on more responsibility for some administrative functions. We are currently in discussions with DCS about how this might happen.
- DCS, like most public funded institutions, is experiencing financial stresses. They have recently indicated that they may need increased financial support from PLATO. (We currently provide them with approximately \$13,500 per year.) We have long benefited from the fact that DCS provides much more support than we provide in reimbursement. This is an issue we will be discussing with them this coming spring.
- With the growth and sophistication of PLATO offerings (fund development, the use of technology, an expanded variety of educational offerings, etc.) we are increasingly dependent on utilizing the various skill sets of our volunteers. We need to find new ways to promote and support a larger number of volunteers on our committees, to coordinate our courses, and communicate and lead.
- PLATO has been able to maintain our dues at \$50 per year for more than a decade. Because our members provide volunteer teaching, committee work, planning, and coordination we have been able to provide a variety of learning/social opportunities very efficiently at a very low cost. PLATO has one of the lowest dues/fee structures of any senior learning organization in the United States.

Many organizations charge 8-10 times what it costs for a PLATO membership. We are reaching a point where our expenses are exceeding our revenues. We will likely need to implement a modest increase in dues in the near future to maintain the quality of learning opportunities offered in PLATO.

Overall, PLATO is a very healthy and growing organization. The challenges we are experiencing are, in large part, due to our success. I have every confidence that we will find solutions, and will emerge as an even more dynamic organization. I will continue to keep all of you informed and, through our Board of Directors, our course coordinators, and our committees, we will continue to be open to hearing your ideas and suggestions.

PLATO Course News

by Lauren Blough, Curriculum Co-Chair

PLATO 2013 Winter Interim Courses

If you've had enough of the holidays but want to extend the seasonal good cheer, why not join others for stimulating inquiry and conversation by registering for one or more of the five PLATO 2013 Winter Interim courses? Maurice Better returns with his investigation of "Fictional Detectives, Police and Private" and Norman Leer continues his study of the arts with "Explorations in Roots Music." For those who would like to share in a lively discussion of science fiction, there's "Out of This World" coordinated by Helen Aarli and Judy Sadowsky. If you're a history buff you have two courses to consider. Don Snyder is new to PLATO but he was a frequent presenter of ancient and medieval history courses for OLLI at Emory University in Atlanta, so come and find out "Why the Middle Ages Matter." Fred Ross will help participants unravel the complexity of "The Scholar's Quest for the Historical Jesus." Classes start in January. Check the PLATO website for the schedule at seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/courses.htm

PLATO

With support from Continuing Studies at UW-Madison

Spring 2013 Preview

Frank Power has been working diligently to make the PLATO Previews an enjoyable and productive experience for all who attend. Come to the PLATO 2013 Spring Preview on Wednesday, Feb 20 from 1:30 to 3 pm to see the exciting results for yourself. Following on the success of the revamped 2012 Spring Preview, Frank, with the help of his able assistants and the Madison Senior Center staff, expanded the setup in the upstairs area where people could meet and consult with the course coordinators. Based on the surveys, this is helpful to members when choosing their courses. For the upcoming Spring 2013 Preview, Frank has introduced another change, providing additional opportunities to learn more about the organization and to chat with the coordinators and your fellow PLATO members.

The 2013 Spring Preview will have a new 90-minute, three-part format that will include:

1:30–2 pm; Downstairs: Two-minute presentations for new courses only, a few brief presentations by the various committees and units of PLATO, designed to enlighten new members and prospective members about PLATO's many events and activities.

2–2:30 pm; Upstairs: Meeting with all course coordinators following the successful Fall Preview table layout format. Committees and other activities will also have tables to inform and engage members.

2:30–3 pm; Downstairs and Upstairs: Socialization and Refreshments.

Spring 2013 Courses

There are several changes to the course schedule for Spring 2013. The regular semester begins the week of Feb 25, but there are variations, so be sure to check for complete details in the Spring 2013 Course Schedule included with this issue, or online at seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/courses.htm. There are four new classes. Mona Wasow and Marti Phillips will coordinate "Retirement in All Its Complexities" for seven sessions at the Madison Senior Center. Sebastian Heinz, Assistant Professor in the UW Astronomy Dept, will present a Wednesday evening course on "Cosmology" at UW Space Place. Oakwood Village Prairie Ridge, a new eastside addition to the PLATO host locations, will be the site for "Moral and Political Issues" organized by Jean Taffs. Mary Morgan says "You Can Draw!" and she will provide the motivation starting on Tuesday, April 2 at the West Side Senior Center. Please call or email the course coordinator to register for those classes that request pre-registration.

Great Opportunities to Explore New Directions

by Stephanie Sorensen, Communications and Membership

2013 will offer PLATO members several marvelous chances to learn new things; some with new teachers. Two very different courses are highlighted here.

One of my own favorite areas to explore is history, and PLATO has a good variety of historically oriented classes. During the winter interim session we will have the chance to hear Don Snyder give lectures on "Why the Middle Ages Matter" (Fridays, Jan 11-Feb 8, 10-Noon). This era is often not as popular as other historical periods, so I am eager to learn how the Middle Ages form the bridge from ancient times to the basis of our modern age. His class is limited to 35 students; please email him at delliffs@aol.com if you are interested in participating. This is a lecture-oriented class, but there will be time for your questions and he will provide informative handouts to read.

Don recently arrived in Madison from Atlanta where, after retiring, he taught many Osher Lifelong Learning Institute courses through Emory University featuring ancient and medieval history. He loves teaching and is eager to continue by sharing his knowledge with us. Don also served as a volunteer docent for several years at Emory University's archeology museum following his retirement. His career in adult educational management offered him an opportunity to teach English in Estonia for several years among other adventures. I personally look forward to a variety of history classes with Don.

Then switch to the other side of your brain by attending our new hands-on drawing class. Mary Morgan, who lives in Mauston, will come to Madison to share her enthusiasm for teaching as well as art beginning in April (Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30 pm, limited to 15 participants). Mary hopes to get us to see, experience and create using our visual selves—rather than our verbal selves—for a change of pace. She will do this in a relaxed and informal setting geared to beginners using simple tools such as pencils, charcoal, or special water-based pens. Mary urges us to give a different side of ourselves a chance to blossom in a comfortable, cooperative environment. PLATO has not had much in the way of hands-on art courses. This will be a wonderful opportunity for a whole new direction. Try it.

Mary had a long career of teaching art, mainly in Rhinelander, Wis. She has taught everyone from preschoolers to college students to continuing education enrollees, including retirees. She truly enjoys opening up new fields of expression for her students and looks forward to continuing this endeavor with us here in Madison.

You can find information about all of our PLATO courses online at seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/courses.htm.

A Note from the Treasurer **PLATO Fund Donors**

by Mike Lovejoy, Treasurer

PLATO continues to enjoy vibrant financial health, but we need to review our financial status in light of our recently broadened mission. As you have heard many times already, we have committed our organization to play a larger role in support of returning adult students at UW-Madison. We hope to do this by increasing our annual PLATO scholarship contributions. The principal mechanism for this effort is the creation of a UW Foundation PLATO Fund, established under the aegis of UW-Madison Continuing Studies. It is intended that the investment earnings of the PLATO Fund, generated by donations from PLATO members like you, will underwrite this initiative.

Thus far the PLATO Fund has received more than \$14,000 in donations, which, when combined with our initial investment of \$80,000 from existing reserve funds, should generate significant moneys for scholarships in 2013. Given that the PLATO Fund is only about six months old, this is an impressive start. Pending year-end investment results from the UW Foundation, our hope is to provide \$6,000 in scholarships in 2013, up from \$3,000 in 2012.

by Patricia Becker, President-Elect

The PLATO Fund was recently established to expand PLATO's mission to include helping returning adult students at UW-Madison take the first step in becoming lifelong learners themselves. Thanks to all of the members, who, as of the end of October have generously contributed to the PLATO Fund. Special additional thanks come from the two recipients of this year's Adult Student Scholarships of \$1,500 each, which were awarded through Continuing Studies this fall. If you would like to donate to the PLATO Fund, visit seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/donate.htm.

Beatty, Ellouise W.
 Beatty, Marvin T.
 Becker, Patricia
 Berg, Jeffrey & Lynn Family Trust
 Berkowitz, Leonard
 Blitzke, Robert K.
 Blough, Lauren M. Living Trust
 Briggs, Michael and Norma
 Bryce, Barbara A.
 Bryce, David A.
 Burger, Jeanne
 Clum, James A.
 Court, Franklin E.
 Coyle, Sheila
 Dilorio, Carla L.
 Dilorio, Meryl M.
 Drew, Sandra
 Finch, Peter
 Fisher, Ellen
 Flax, Bela
 Foget, Kaj S.
 Foget, Karen I.

Gregg, Bruce S.
 Gregg, Marsha L.
 Grogan, Jane F.
 Hecht, Rudolph C.
 Joshi, Madhu S.
 Karn, Lois
 Kerndt, Miriam E.
 King, Judith M.
 Kolar, Scott A.
 Loomis, Abigail A.
 Mason, Teresa
 McCarthy, James & Joan,
 Joint Revocable Trust
 Merrill, Linda E.
 Miller, Paul H.
 Mish, Joan G.
 Moore, James D.
 Moore, Patricia D.
 Morgan, Mary O.
 Morrison, Kathryn Revocable Trust
 Otis, Tim
 Paesel, Audrey
 Paesel, Fred
 Reeder, Carol B.
 Reeder, Don D.
 Ross, Frederic R.
 Ross, Mary T.
 Samson, Faye F.
 Samson, Harland E.
 Taylor, Judith A.
 Test, Mary Ann
 Thompson Rice, Margaret
 Wadsworth, Doug
 Walker Gill, Elizabeth
 Wasow, Mona C.
 Watson, Patricia A.
 Weiler, Peter R.
 Wilcox Zins, Mary
 Winters, Conrad W.
 Zuckerman, Alan
 Zuckerman, Marilyn

PLATO Website Working For You

by Scott Kolar, At-Large Director

The PLATO website provides one-stop shopping for all your PLATO information needs. Misplaced your course schedule or course description sheets? You can find them on the Courses page. Print out a new schedule or just look at the online version. Want to know where a course is located? Click on the map link next to the course's location. Want to send an email to the course coordinator? Click on the coordinator's name in the listing.

Are you using social media? Spread the word about PLATO to all your Facebook friends or Twitter followers by clicking on the links. There are also other social media sites to choose from, or forward a PLATO page to all your friends using "good old fashioned" email.

Help support returning adult learners at UW-Madison by donating to the PLATO Fund. On the Donation page you can find out about the PLATO scholarships and how to contribute. Donate online by clicking on the contribution button. You will be sent directly to the UW Foundation's secure online donation page for the PLATO Fund.

Want to know what is going on in PLATO? Check out the Events page to find out about the latest special events. On the Publications page you can review past issues of the Persimmon. Want to share *The Agora* with your friends, but don't want to give up your own copy? No problem. Both issues are available on the website. You can share it with all your friends by simply sending an email.

Don't forget about your PLATO membership. Save yourself a stamp, envelope, and a check. On the Membership page you can join or renew your membership online. It's fast, easy, safe, and secure.

Check out the PLATO website today at seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/index.html

PLATO Board of Directors Appoints Two At-Large Board Members

by Tim Otis, PLATO President

This past fall two at-large PLATO board members (Greg Bell and Harold Green) assumed standing committee chair (co-chair) responsibilities, becoming board members by virtue of their committee leadership roles. This resulted in two open at-large PLATO board slots. The nominating committee (Patricia Becker, Lauren Blough, Tim Otis, and Judy Sadowsky, Chair, met and recommended Aleta Murray and Sybil Better for board membership at the November board meeting. The board unanimously approved the recommendations. Both of these new board members bring a wealth of experience and have been actively involved in PLATO committee functions.

News About *The Agora*, Volume 3

by Edna Canfield, Agora Committee

The deadline for submissions to the third volume of PLATO's literary publication, *The Agora*, is fast approaching (Feb 1). We look forward to again receiving a wide range of thoughtful and interesting works from our PLATO members. For information about submitting materia: seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/agora.htm

Our Editor-in-chief, Vaunceil Kruse, has moved out of state. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for her expertise and hard work, which resulted in the high quality of volumes 1 and 2. Thank you Vaunceil!

PLATO—A Community Resource. What impact do 900 PLATO senior citizens have on our community!

by T. Greg Bell, Chair, Communication and Membership Committee

Some retirement communities listed in *MONEY magazine* feature their senior programs as their number-one attraction. In Madison, our PLATO organization offers 40 wide-ranging, topical, lecture and discussion courses with a Travel and Special Events program attracting 900 members. PLATO is also attracting newly minted retirees moving to Madison. We've recently learned that 40-somethings in our area are telling their retired parents to move here because seniors have so many fascinating things to choose from in Madison, like PLATO! This trend has accelerated and will continue as the "Baby Boomer" generation retires over the next several years. AARP-Wisconsin has recognized this trend in their reporting as well. Do you have a story about bringing new people to PLATO? We'd like to hear it. Please send it to: plato-slp@dcs.wisc.edu

My question is: Does our Chamber of Commerce know about PLATO? Do real estate firms know about PLATO? We want to know! Our job, should you choose to accept it, is to ask these organizations if they are aware of PLATO and use PLATO in their promotional literature. Your Communication and Membership Committee (C&M) is already working on these new member issues and we could use your help. Please consider joining our C&M Committee. You can find information about PLATO committees online at seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/organization.htm#committees

The Joy of PLATO Courses

by Rochelle Abramson, *Communications and Membership*

PLATO is an acronym that stands for Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization. If you say the acronym quickly, or with an east coast accent, it sounds a lot like PLAY-DOH, that nontoxic, reusable modeling compound that comes in a variety of bright colors and can be molded into multiple creations.

PLATO courses, similarly, come in a variety of appealing choices just waiting for you to help mold it into something that speaks to you. Courses are organized and led by peers. They are as varied as the approximately 900 members, people who are nearing or actively enjoying retirement. Music appreciation, philosophy, travel, literature, film, memoir writing, and physics are some of the offerings. Participants range from people who come armed with research about each topic, to people hanging out and hoping to learn something new. Attending these courses, which meet weekly throughout the year, are talkers and listeners, wits and laughers, and a nourishing mix of all the elements. Life experience is as much a part of the discussions as are hobbies and vocations. All this costs just \$50 and you can sign up for as many courses as you'd like to take. Join by calling 608-262-5823 or find information online at seniorlearning.wisc.edu/plato/membership.htm

"Short Stories and Essays" is the first course I signed up to take. I originally chose it because I'm lazy; the title of the course contained the word "short," and it meets across the street from where I live. (Courses are held at venues throughout Madison). Four years later, I would continue to attend this course even if I had to travel an hour. In fact, one of the students does travel over an hour

to meet with us. Our leader is laid back and democratic. He suggests books that contain essays and another few that contain short stories. We argue a bit, and then choose the books we will read for the next 10 weeks. The homework consists of reading just one short story and one essay a week. A course participant volunteers to lead the discussion on a particular story or essay, and is also responsible for giving a five-minute talk about the essay's or story's author. Then we discuss! Opinions are freely given, but, amazingly, respectfully accepted. The backgrounds of the "students" range from isolated farms to inner city urban. There are scientists, professors, psychologists, teachers, business people, Peace Corps graduates, condo dwellers, and serious outdoorsmen. Some are loud, some are quiet. We have a ball, and learn something new every time.

"Film History" is another favorite. Keeping with the lazy theme, I originally chose this course because there is no homework required. (Not that it stops the more ambitious who read books on the various historical eras and biographies about the directors and actors. Happily, they generously share their acquired knowledge.) The leader is prodigiously schooled in everything to do with film, and gives a short introductory lecture before the lights go out. Prior to the fall course, where we saw and discussed films from the later '30s, we learned about the very first, very short "moving pictures," and, later, the silent features, and early talkies. It is so stimulating, that if I miss a session I bestir myself to stream or find a DVD and watch at home. When we reach the present era, I will probably take the entire course again, and this time, actually do the extracurricular readings.

Do plunge in; check out the course offerings; sign up; it will be as much fun as you want it to be.

Upcoming Day Trips

We are always looking for new members to bring fresh ideas and energy to the Special Events committee. If you are interested, contact co-chairs Mary Boyd (608-222-7673) or Linda Bunger (608-232-1725).

Our upcoming events include:

Day Trips

Feb 7

Other Desert Cities play at Goodman Theater, Chicago (registration deadline, Dec. 18, 2012).

March 20

Picasso and Chicago Exhibit at Art Institute, Chicago (watch for registration information).

April 12

Art in Bloom Exhibit, Milwaukee Art Museum (watch for registration info in February). This event pairs art, mostly paintings, with floral arrangements.

April 17

Jeeves in Bloom, a comedy at Milwaukee Chamber Theater (watch for registration information in late February or early March).

July 25

The Jungle Book premier at the Goodman Theater in Chicago (watch for registration information in late April).

Lecture Events

Early Spring

Lectures about Wisconsin's biotech/information tech industries, dates to be announced in 2013.

PLATO Holds 25th Anniversary Celebration

by Judy Sadowsky and Greg Bell

On Oct 12, 2012, PLATO held a 25th Anniversary celebration at the Pyle Center on campus. Approximately 120 PLATO members and guests were feted in the Alumni Lounge. The floor-to-ceiling glass-walled room looked out on a glorious, early fall evening with clear blue sky over Lake Mendota at sunset, a near-perfect setting for a special celebration.

Five PLATO Pioneers were presented certificates in recognition of their original work in support of the PLATO idea. Former President Fred Ross, who Mastered the Ceremonies introduced Marv Betty, who presented a brief but compelling PLATO history enhanced with Power Point slides. Current PLATO President Tim Otis presented the five honorees with their

“Certificates of Appreciation” for pioneering the PLATO courses and nurturing them along in the first few years. The PLATO Pioneers honored were: Bill Mossman, Barbara Nodine, “Irv” Probst, Meyer Williams, and former DCS dean Harland Sampson, who guided PLATO’s beginning. Sampson spoke about the determination of the earliest members of PLATO and marveled at the rapid development in recent years to 40 courses and nearly 1,000 members. Sampson congratulated PLATO on its accomplishments over 25 years and concluded that the future looks very good for PLATO to continue growing.

Following the certificate presentations, Fred Ross recognized 14 former PLATO presidents. Mary Boyd’s Special Events Committee made arrangements for the celebration planned by the 25th Anniversary Committee and chaired by former President Judy Sadowsky. The other

committee members were Marv Beatty, Nancy Stolla, Mary Boyd, and Greg Bell. Fred Ross concluded the ceremonies with an invitation for everyone present to be there for the 50th Anniversary in 25 years.

Special Events Committee

The Special Events Committee has had a busy fall semester. We meet monthly to plan lectures, day trips, and other events. These events can take time to organize; theater events, in particular, require registration far in advance of the event itself. To address this, announcements will be sent throughout the year as special events are scheduled. Email is our quickest form of communication and what we will commonly use. However, we also periodically send out paper announcements to those without email addresses.



Twelve past PLATO presidents and President Tim Otis



President Tim Otis, Past President Barbara Nodine, and Past President Fred Ross



Past President Marv Beatty presents 25 years of PLATO



President Tim Otis and former dean Harland Sampson

Photos by: Martin Jenich, Special Events 2013, Mary Boyd, Special Events