

PLATO PERSIMMON

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Spring Courses Highlighted at Preview!

By Lewis Bosworth and Mary Boyd



The Spring Course Preview is scheduled for **Wednesday, February 17th, 2016 at the Madison Senior Center, 330 West Mifflin Street, Madison from 1:30—3:00pm.** Our format gives members plenty of flexibility. It's a Fair-like structure with tables set up in rows on the first floor of the Senior Center, with aisles for members to stroll from table to table and meet and talk with any of the coordinators present. New coordinators will be identified so you can find and meet them easily. Committee Chairs will also be available to answer questions about upcoming events and *opportunities to volunteer or become a course coordinator.*

You can go anytime between 1:30pm and 3:00pm. Refreshments will be served.



At 2:15pm we have scheduled a brief session with PLATO officers and Board members on the second floor of the Senior Center. This will give you a chance to ask questions and learn more about the structure of PLATO—its committees, its charitable arm, The PLATO Fund, and the Agora, PLATO's literary journal. Everyone is welcome to attend this session. We hope that new members, especially, will join us to learn more about everything PLATO has to offer. And we hope our format will ease the parking problems we have experienced in the past and give members more flexibility in using their time to learn about new and recurring courses. See you at the Preview on February 17th!

Special Events: Another Way for Members to Learn and Connect

by Janet Cabot, Chair



Vilas Zoo Tour

The Special Events Committee has been hard at work extending opportunities for education and engagement beyond the classroom. Hundreds of PLATO members took advantage of more than a dozen field trips, lectures and local events from July through December.

The 2015-16 special events calendar kicked off in July in Lake Geneva (boat tour and Yerkes Observatory.) From there it was on to Green Bay (Botanical Garden and Lambeau Field), Oshkosh (Dressing Downton) and then back to Madison (Vilas Zoo's Arctic Exhibit and Madison College's culinary program) before heading to historic Galena, IL. Sprinkled in were global hotspot lectures as well as lectures on scams targeting seniors and "On Fourth Lake: A Social History of Lake Mendota." We reprised two popular

events - the End of Life seminar and Madison Public Library research primer. More than 150 PLATO members and guests went to Milwaukee to see these different productions put on by the Milwaukee Repertory.

Looking ahead to February, March and April, the Special Events Committee will be offering:

— **Theatre lovers** three Milwaukee Rep performances: The Devil's Music: The Life & Blues of Bessie Smith" (February 28); The Invisible Hand" (March 9) and American Song (April 6);

— **Art lovers** two shows at the Milwaukee Art Museum. We'll tour "Art in Bloom," the spectacular fusion of flowers and art, on March 18 and go back to MAM for a docent lecture and tour of "Nature and the American Vision: The Hudson River School Exhibition" on April 29;

— **Music lovers** the opportunity to hear Ensemble Constantinople Concert, Early Music Now on March 19 at UW-Madison.

Lectures on a variety of topics are also in the works. New this spring will be a two-month trial access for PLATO and UW-Madison Retirement Association (UWRA) members to each other's field trips, subject to the non-member guest policies of each.

This summer the popular Kaffeeklatsches will be back and we'll debut trolley tours

of the UW Campus. Our weekly Special Events email updates are sent every Monday. Upcoming events that are open for registration appear on the platomadison.org home page. The full calendar listing of events can be accessed when you click on the "Events" tab, also on the home page.

Interested in joining the Special Events Committee? Please email Special Events Chair Janet Cabot at jbcabot52@gmail.com.

President's Corner: PLATO on the Move

By PLATO President Frank Power



PLATO continued making progress during the latter half of 2015. In August the PLATO Board thoroughly reviewed the *2015 Membership Survey Summary* ably prepared by Mary De Wolf, the Membership Committee Chair. "Take Aways" and Directives were given to the Executive Committee for action. The review formed the basis for two substantive board discussions, leadership development issues and the annual meeting. Member

opinions expressed in our surveys matter.

The September board discussions on Leadership Development were led by President-elect, Scott Kolar and Immediate Past-president Mary Boyd. The resulting action was a planned visitation of almost every fall course by the board members calling for volunteers. Active committee participation makes PLATO hum and grooms leaders. Thankfully, about two dozen members responded to the board's call.

In October, the board considered the member responses to the survey questions about the Annual Meeting. The resulting 2016 planned changes include conducting the elections online, more socialization, celebratory recognition of our members and better selection of speakers. In addition, based on the PLATO Core Value, *Collaborate with other entities serving senior learners*, the board approved a trial reciprocal money-saving effort for bus trips with the UWRA, the University of Wisconsin Retirement Association.

On October 14th there was a PLATO Arts Café celebration of the publication of Vol. 4 of the *Agora*. Special thanks are due to

both the Agora Editor, Patricia Becker and the impresario of the heartfelt artistic and social event, Lewis Bosworth.

In November the board carefully reviewed and largely approved the ad hoc Diversity Committee's Report, The committee, presciently set up earlier in the year at the request of Lewis Bosworth, called for an active, open and welcoming approach for all members of Madison and Dane County's diverse community. PLATO received a grant of \$2,000 from the Madison Community Foundation and set aside an additional \$1,500 to videotape and put up on our website a number of lectures on Madison's unconscionable racial disparities. The lectures were presented in Rick Orton's new course, *Racial Injustice and Inequality in Madison, Wisconsin*. (See the review by Janet Hanson in this issue of *Persimmon*.) Part of Dennis Dresang's popular course, *Whither Wisconsin*, was dedicated to the study of the shameful rates of incarceration of black men in Wisconsin, Dane County and the consequent devastating impact upon their children and family life. PLATO, through its Diversity Committee, aims to be part of

Madison's conversation on racial injustice and inequality. Be sure to view the aforementioned videotapes when they are posted in the spring.

December is a time for PLATO to celebrate, socialize and enjoy the holidays. This year at the board's holiday gathering, we invited all the former board members who served during the last five years to help us honor the retiring UW Professor Barry Orton. He has been the UW faculty liaison to PLATO for five years. We owe both our new PLATO office and accomplished office manager, Louise Fowler, and so much more to the dedication and skillful advocacy of Professor Orton.

Finally, in 2016, the board will be dialoguing with the various PLATO committees and their respective chairpersons. The challenges of meaningful courses, activities, leadership, finances, the PLATO Fund, member participation, learning, teaching and socialization await us.

PLATO Membership by

Mary De Wolf, Chair



Signing up a new member at the Fall Preview

PLATO is growing by leaps and bounds. Our membership is just under 1200, and every day we add more people who are eager to learn, people who wish to participate in a vibrant, active community of like-minded individuals. PLATO has added more classes every semester, and has expanded the special events trips. There are even more stimulating lectures on current topics that affect us all. And all this is due to the hard work of a few dedicated members who unselfishly give of their time to make PLATO the great organization that it is.

One of the Membership Committee's responsibilities is to go out into the community and inform people about PLATO. We give talks at senior centers and 55-plus communities. We also represent PLATO at fairs and seminars in the greater Madison area. And currently, the committee is

developing a brochure which will be distributed to senior centers, libraries, social centers and places where seniors gather. It will also be handed out when we attend invitational seminars.

Besides our work outside of PLATO, I hope you have seen our table at the spring and fall previews, and at the annual luncheon. Membership volunteers man these tables to answer questions and provide direction to newcomers.

The Membership Committee is also looking for people who wish to take a greater role in the PLATO organization. People to coordinate a class or volunteer for a committee. If that is you, you can contact any committee chair or any member of the board of directors. Their names and contact information are listed on the website "platomadison.org". I hope we will see you at the spring preview, please stop at our table and say hello.

Highlighting the Racial Injustice and Inequality in Madison course. By Janet Beach-Hanson

Last fall, a group of PLATO members, all white, gathered for Rick Orton's 10-week course, *Racial Injustice and*

Inequality in Madison, Wisconsin. For many of us, it was a challenging and intensely personal journey.

We were drawn to the course by our surprise, even shock, at the well publicized 2013 *Race to Equity Report*, which found that Dane County has some of the nation's highest disparities between black and white residents on standard measures of well-being.

Rick recruited outstanding community leaders to speak* and arranged several tours of their facilities. During their presentations, and lively Q&A discussions, they shared their deep knowledge of the subject, and also personal experiences and feelings. I, and others, felt lucky to be in the room. (*The presentations, but not the discussions, were videotaped and will be available in 2016.*)

Topics covered included: racial disparities, causes and solutions; mass incarceration; implicit bias; micro-aggression; proximity; employment challenges; and investment in young people.

The information was illuminating. It also raised questions about our own implicit biases, racism and white complacency. We

asked ourselves, how can we be part of the solution? How can we confront our own white discomfort, and be white allies as blacks move forward?

The problems seem almost insurmountable, but when we heard about what is already being done and what is planned, I came away optimistic. Progress is possible here, and we can all be part of it.

*Speakers: Erica Nelson (Wisconsin Council on Children and Families), Reverend Jerry Hancock (First Congregational United Church of Christ), Reverend Dr. Alex Gee (Fountain of Life Church and Nehemiah Corporation), Michael Johnson (Boys and Girls Club), Dr. Ruben Anthony (Urban League), Professor Earlise Ward and Teresa Uyen Nguyen (UW-Madison)

I prepared a short study guide on this topic for myself and will happily share it. For a copy, e-mail hansonjw@sbglobal.net.

Thank you to PLATO Volunteers By Scott Kolar, President-Elect

As you know PLATO is an all volunteer organization. We have Louise Fowler who provides wonderful administrative support in the

PLATO office at the Division of Continuing Studies. But we only have her part time. All the other functions necessary to keep PLATO running, curriculum, special events, the Persimmon, the Agora, membership, finance, the website, etc. are all performed by volunteer PLATO members.

If you attended a class in October, you probably had a member of the PLATO Board of Directors visit to make an appeal for volunteers to help PLATO. Your response was overwhelming! Thank you very much. It is very heartening to have so many people demonstrate how important PLATO is to them by offering to help keep it going. Again, thanks much!

If you are interested in volunteering in PLATO or would like more information about volunteer opportunities, **please contact me at 886-8150 or kolarsmmj@gmail.com.**

PLATO Membership Directory – CHANGE in Contact Information “Opt Out

In 2016, PLATO will be changing the way members can “opt out” of having their contact information displayed in the online and print Membership Directory. In the past, members could request that their postal

address and/or telephone number and/or email address not be displayed in the Directory by “opting out”.

Beginning March 1, 2016, contact information “opt out” will be for **all** contact information – address, telephone and email – not just one or some information types. If you “opt out” only your name will be visible to other PLATO members. If you don’t “opt out” your contact information will be displayed to other PLATO members in the password-protected online Directory and the print edition (mailed in the Fall to members who don’t have web or email access).

To have your contact information displayed in the Directory, there is no need to do anything! Including contact information is our default standard.

To “opt out” of having your contact information included in the Directory: Send an email to: info@platomadison.org with **Contact Opt-Out** as your Subject.

In the email, please give your first and last name and indicate, “I request my contact information not be included in the PLATO Directory.” Or telephone the PLATO Office (262-5823) and leave a voicemail message with the above information.

NOTE: If you have currently “opted out” of having just some of your contact information displayed, please **notify the PLATO Office by February 15th** if you would like to “opt out” for all contact information.

The Agora by Patricia Becker



Volume 4 of *The Agora*, PLATO’s literary and arts journal, was mailed to member households in September. Those who worked to produce the volume, and the authors and artists represented in it, hope that you have enjoyed this compilation of creative works by PLATO members. And this enjoyment should not be just in the past tense – *The Agora* is a volume to pick up now and then, to read or re-read the poems and short pieces of fiction and non-fiction, and to appreciate again the visual arts entries.

To celebrate publication of Volume 4, many of the contributors gathered with other PLATO members and the PLATO Editorial Board on October 14th at the Madison Senior Center.

There, at the third PLATO Arts Café, the volume's poets, artists, and authors provided the sometimes moving, sometimes playful context to their works. For those of us who were not contributors, a highlight of the event was connecting faces and personalities to the artistry represented in Volume 4.

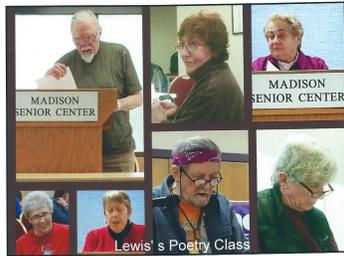
It isn't too early to be thinking about contributing to the next volume, scheduled to be published in the fall of 2017. The Editorial Board welcomes volunteers to join us in bringing Volume 5 to fruition. If you are interested, contact Patricia Becker at ptbecker@wisc.edu. In the meantime, if you can't locate your copy of Volume 4, visit it, as well as the three previous volumes, on the PLATO website, platomadison.org.

Seniors as Poets

By Lewis Bosworth

I've been offering the course "Seniors as Poets" since summer of 2012. The concept takes its roots from the story of Grandma Moses. If she could start painting at age 78, why can't PLATO members write poetry starting at ages 50 or 60 or older? Take a gander at the fresh, talented faces in the photo-collage done by PLATO member and poetry student Felicitus [Fay] Ferington! Don't they appear

every bit as talented as Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson or Billy Collins?



I'm proud of my students. Many have been published in the pages of *The Agora*, PLATO's arts and ideas journal; others write for fun or to improve their creative writing skills. Writing is every bit as creative as painting or sculpture and perhaps more challenging, depending on whom you ask.

In my classes we may learn form – the sonnet, for example – or we may prefer free verse, but we do learn a lot about the basics of poetry: metaphor, rhyme, meter, etc. But mostly we learn how language can be enhanced and electrified to produce a poem.

Here are just a few lines from my students this fall:

Help! I've been tangled in a chain of rhyme. Don't fret, I've made good use of my time.

The key is in the keyhole where it ought to be...The smoke is in the chimney...soon it will be free.

*an empty dog bowl
a leash without a purpose
our dear friend is dead*

We carry the seeds of our own deaths. Seeds which wait, hide and sleep,...

*It is midnight in Paris
and the moon is full
and my heart takes me there again*