

2021 Annual Meeting

President's Report

By Kathy Brown, President, PLATO Board of Directors, 2020 - 2021

PLATO – Where Love of Learning Never Gets Old! Who would have guessed that 2020 would bring us so many challenges that tested our organization's dedication to that tagline. We were tested and challenged and learned along the way, and we should be proud of carrying on the PLATO traditions in new and innovative ways for our members. While we as individuals changed our patterns and practices to cope with the pandemic, PLATO committees also changed and learned to adapt to the new reality. Follow along for a review of PLATO in fiscal year 2021.

Summer 2020

The pandemic was front and center in our lives last summer, but PLATO committees were busy at work behind the scenes collaborating with each other. The Technology Committee partnered with the Curriculum and Special Events committees to explore new technology options to provide our members with learning and social opportunities. To prepare PLATO course coordinators for their new role as virtual coordinators, the Curriculum Committee held numerous online tutorial sessions for course coordinators, guiding them through the process of using Google Meet as a platform for facilitating their courses. Thanks to course coordinators willing to utilize the new online technology, ten courses were offered last summer. To help PLATO members feel more comfortable with the online courses, the Curriculum Committee hosted online tutorials for those who wanted to practice the technology before attending a course. A partner in all these online endeavors was the Technology Committee who provided a range of assistance from setting up member accounts to helping troubleshoot issues for coordinators and member attendees.

While field and theater trips were on "pandemic pause", the Theater team members began identifying virtual theater options to post on the PLATO website to keep the theater enthusiasts engaged. Our website is managed by the Technology Committee. A new item in the Tuesday Weekly email was the addition of an Agora feature, which included poetry and visual arts. Contributors recorded brief comments about their piece to provide our members with further information about the entry. Even the twice-monthly breakfast social gatherings continued to be offered via Zoom instead of in-person since we all know the importance of connecting with others even during a pandemic.

National events of the Summer of 2020 reflected a reckoning on issues brought to the forefront, including systemic racism. Recognizing this inflection point regarding racism, the Board unanimously passed a resolution provided by the Diversity Awareness Committee that strongly condemns the decades of systemic racial oppression that continues to occur in our country and urges implementation of meaningful solutions.

To guide the PLATO Board with decisions regarding the pandemic's impact on PLATO activities, a COVID Advisory Workgroup was formed with five talented PLATO members with medical and legal expertise. The workgroup provided criteria for decisions regarding re-opening any PLATO activities, and they continue to provide updated guidance to the Board on these matters.

Because of the impact of the pandemic on PLATO's programming, the PLATO Board of Directors voted unanimously to renew all memberships for the 2020-21 year without a membership fee. Our members were offered the opportunity to donate toward our office operations for anyone who chose to do so. After this one-year waiver of the \$60 fee, renewal dues will be communicated, as usual, in June 2021.

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Fall 2020

The Special Events Committee secured guest speakers for Fall online lectures, and they fine-tuned their skills as moderators for each session. It took a “village” to make each lecture work seamlessly for the participants. Recordings were made of the lectures and several larger classes using our Zoom webinar account, which have been posted on the PLATO website for viewing at one's chosen time. All of this required new knowledge and collaboration between Special Events and the Technology Committees.

Using new technology skills gained by PLATO course coordinators, the Curriculum Committee offered 36 online courses in the Fall. At the end of the Fall semester, a survey of course coordinators was taken to gather feedback on the courses and lessons learned from their collective experience. Most coordinators found the technology presented a challenging learning curve, but many coordinators also reported a high degree of satisfaction with navigating this new online territory once they learned to become more comfortable with seeing the friendly faces each week on the screen (without masks).

The Membership and Communication Committee led an initiative to redesign the annual open house. A 10-member team conducted an evaluation of the costs and benefits of implementing a successful open house, reviewing what other organizations have done, looking for best practices, and surveying a sample of PLATO members for their feedback on the annual open house. Because of the findings from this evaluation and declining attendance at our traditional open houses, the design team recommended that PLATO look at alternative methods for the foreseeable future to provide opportunities for our members to learn about PLATO courses, events, and activities while also socializing with others.

The Fund Development Committee had a very successful Fall campaign with a record number of PLATO members contributing. Those receiving our donations were very appreciative for our support, particularly during the pandemic. Funds provided scholarships to four returning UW students. Donations were also given to the UW Odyssey Project and to five community-based organizations that help prepare students from lower income or disadvantaged groups for academic success.

When Edie Urness-Pondillo retired last September, we were informed by the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies (DCS) of their hiring freeze and their inability to provide us with assistance to search for a new office operations staff member. A change in our relationship with DCS was communicated by the DCS Dean who stated that PLATO should look outside of the UW-Madison to address our ongoing staffing needs. To guide us with this change, the PLATO Board set up a New Administrative Model workgroup to study the options for securing our staffing needs and make recommendations to the Board on the topic. We are very thankful that long-time office operations associate Louise Fowler increased her hours for six or more months throughout this transition.

Winter 2021

The pandemic continued while vaccines were being developed and made available. Six online courses and multiple lectures via Zoom were available, and there was no need to venture out in cold weather for these events. The Diversity Awareness Committee updated their mission to provide a more accurate description of their purpose, and they also partnered with the Curriculum Committee to survey coordinators' interest in learning more about resources related to social justice and racial disparities.

The Agora Editorial Board began soliciting submissions for Volume 7, which will be available this summer. Each submission was juried by teams of Agora Board members based on the category of submission. At the same time the leadership of The Agora worked with the Technology Committee to investigate internet platforms for an enhanced online version of the publication.

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The New Administrative Model workgroup was busy exploring options for ongoing PLATO staffing needs and recommended to the Board that an independent contractor would be the preferable method for meeting our staffing needs. With the Board's approval, the workgroup created a Request for Proposal (RFP) and began solicitation of proposals. PLATO members were kept up to date with developments related to these projects through periodic notices in the Tuesday Weekly emails.

Thanks to the work of the Nominating Committee, a slate of candidates willing to serve on the PLATO Board was presented to the membership for their votes. The new Board will take over on July 1.

Spring 2021

The dedicated course coordinators and lecture moderators continued to provide learning opportunities during the spring. There were 28 courses offered in the Spring semester, for a total of 70 courses for fiscal year 2021. Some courses didn't even miss a beat during breaks between semesters because PLATO members and coordinators chose to continue meeting in some of the courses. That's love of learning at its best! A total of 20 informative lectures were offered from September through May; then outdoor special events became available. Walks in Dane County became PLATO's first steps back to in-person programming while closely following all health safety metrics for those gatherings. It remained difficult to predict the return of in-person PLATO events since it often depends on host locations willingness to be open to our events. Our Tuesday Weekly emails and the PLATO website have provided up-to-date information on these topics.

The Membership & Communication Committee conducted a member satisfaction survey regarding online courses and lectures. It also included questions about support for the Agora. There was a 48% response rate. Key findings were that two-thirds of respondents would be willing to participate in both online and in-person courses in the future, which gives Curriculum and Special Events Committees some flexibility as they develop programming for next year. The Agora received relatively broad support of PLATO members to continue their work, and the results pointed out the opportunity to find efficiencies by reducing the number of printed copies instead of arbitrarily sending one to every PLATO member. The survey also collected many names of PLATO members interested in learning more about committee and coordinator opportunities.

Our treasurer reports that PLATO is finishing this fiscal year in sound financial shape even after suspending dues for the 2020 – 2021 year. Going into this next fiscal year, we will resume collecting dues at the past rate of \$60 per year. The unknowns for the coming year that will affect our financial health are the uncertainty of when we will be able to resume in-person programming and what the costs of our new administrative support model will be. But our sound financial position gives us the capability to cover our fixed costs as we hopefully begin to resume normal programming.

As we review the past fiscal year, the confluence of a global pandemic, our association with the UW-Madison DCS which will change but not end, and the uncertainty about the availability of our host locations have all presented many challenges. Through it all, PLATO has remained committed to our mission and values of providing life-long learning opportunities. Together we are seeing the light at the end of tunnel and look forward to seeing each other in person when it is safe to do so.

Thank you for your commitment to PLATO!

May 2021

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PLATO Committees

Thank you to all the committee members who volunteered their time and talents.

Curriculum Committee	Finance Committee
Fund Development Committee	Membership & Communication Committee
Special Events Committee	Technology Committee
The Agora Editorial Board	Diversity Awareness Committee
COVID Advisory Workgroup	New Administrative Model Workgroup
Nominating Committee	

Election Results

Officers and board members elected for the 2021 – 2022 membership year:

Kathy Brown	President, 2021 – 2022
Rod McKenzie	Vice President, 2021 – 2022
Scott Kolar	Treasurer, 2021 – 2022
Patricia Herrling	Secretary, 2021 – 2022
Dory Christensen	At-Large Director
Mike Kernats	At-Large Director

Thank You - PLATO Board 2020 – 2021	Welcome - PLATO Board 2021 - 2022
Kathy Brown, President	Kathy Brown, President
Rod McKenzie, Vice President	Rod McKenzie, Vice President
Scott Kolar, Treasurer	Scott Kolar, Treasurer
Patricia Herrling, Secretary	Patricia Herrling, Secretary
Michael Stevens, Past President	Michael Stevens, Past President
Paul Thompson, Curriculum Committee Chair	Paul Thompson, Curriculum Committee Chair
Janet Cabot, Special Events Committee Chair	Carla Dilorio, Special Events Committee Chair
Hedy Lukas, Membership & Communication Chair	Hedy Lukas, Membership & Communication Chair
Scott Kolar, Technology Committee	Sandi Fike, Technology Committee
Rod McKenzie, Fund Development	Rod McKenzie, Fund Development
Meg Taylor, At-Large Director	Alan Capelle, At-Large Director
Bill Eisinger, At-Large Director	Jatinder Cheema, At-Large Director
Alan Capelle, At-Large Director	Dory Christensen, At-Large Director
Jatinder Cheema, At-Large Director	Mike Kernats, At-Large Director
Sharon Scattish, At-Large Director	Sharon Scattish, At-Large Director

Board Members Completing Service this Year

Bill Eisinger	At-Large Director, Managing Editor – The Agora
Meg Taylor	At-Large Director, Chair – COVID Advisory Workgroup
Janet Cabot	Special Events Committee Chair

UW-Madison Continuing Studies Staff

- Louise Fowler, PLATO Office Operations Coordinator
- Hope Simon, Assistant Dean-Administration & PLATO Liaison