

Key Findings of PLATO Satisfaction Survey March, 2021

Background on the Survey

The PLATO Member Survey was deployed by Russell Consulting, Inc. on March 17th and the survey window was closed on March 31st. Survey invitations were sent to 1,422 members with e-mail addresses and a PDF version of the survey was mailed to 37 members without e-mail addresses. Fifty-one members “unsubscribed” to the survey invitations – suggesting that they weren’t interested in participating in the survey.

Of the 1,459 total surveys distributed via e-mail or mail, 696 submitted completed or partial surveys for a response rate of 48%.

► Regarding online Courses offered between April, 2020 and March, 2021

Participation: 354 respondents participated in online courses, 315 did not.

Why not participate: 40% of the responses checked the statement that on-line classes are not a preferred way to learn, 34% checked the statement that a key priority for them is social interaction which this does not provide.

Comments: More than 50% of the 125 commenters said they were busy with other things. About 33% said they didn’t see courses of interest and less than 20% mentioned technology as a deterrent.

What liked about online: the respondents who participated in online courses rated highest the attractions of not needing to leave home (83%); and not having parking issues (67%) or weather related issues (73%) along with the ability to see/hear participants (58%).

Comments: 50% of the 46 commenters complimented the quality of the courses and ability to have speakers participate remotely; 50% said online offered a safe alternative.

What liked least: lack of social interaction (65%), technology issues (60%), difficulty participating (30%).

Comments: About 50% of the 44 commenters noted technology issues including participants not muting their mics; 50% mentioned the limitations of online including diminished quality of discussion and social contact.

Future preferences re: online vs in-person classes: 66% of the 655 responders said, depending on the courses, they would be willing to take either online or in-person classes; 25% said they would only participate in in-person classes and only 5% said they would only participate in online classes.

Considerations: *The good news here is that responders are willing to participate in online courses as an alternative which gives coordinators and attendees some flexibility. There are opportunities to improve the technological delivery of course information through various*

visual techniques; and opportunities to better “manage” participant engagement--controlling the distractions of unmuted links and improved ways for participants to express themselves.

► Regarding Lectures

40% of the 649 responders participated in online lectures; 60% did not.

Why not participate: 33% of responses supported the statement that the topics were not of interest, and 32% that online delivery is not preferred.

Comments: Of the 133 responders “too busy” was a frequent comment; a few said they were not aware of the lectures but usually accepted responsibility for not seeking out the info.

What did you like (among those who attended lectures): Of the responses (94%) supported the statement “interesting topic”; (90%) “interesting speaker”; (70%) “no need to leave home”; and (60%) “no parking or weather issues”.

Comments: Of the 20 commenters most frequently reported were that they liked to participate while out of town, while comfortably safe at home, and with the opportunity to “try” and leave the lecture if uninterested.

(Among those who attended lectures) What did you not like: 31% of responses supported the statement of limited opportunities for social engagement, and 26% supported the statement of occasional technology issues.

Comments: Of the 11 commenters technology issues, uninteresting topics and poor speaker skills were noted.

Future preferences for online vs in-person lectures: 68% of the 642 responders are receptive to either; 21% will only attend in-person lectures; 6% prefer only on-line lectures.

Considerations: *The good news here is that responders are willing to participate in online lectures which gives the SEC some flexibility and perhaps greater opportunity to attract quality speakers from around the world. There are opportunities to improve the technological delivery of lectures and opportunities to better engage the audience, enabling more feedback and questions during the lectures.*

► Regarding The Agora

How much do responders value the Agora: 642 members responded to this question. The consultants noted that the ratings on the 10 points scale (10 is the highest) were unusual in that there were high numbers at the lowest and highest ends of the 10-point scale. 37% of respondents gave a value rating for the Agora of 6 or higher; 63% of respondents gave a value rating of 5.5 or lower.

Comments from those who rated it 6 and above on 10 point scale: 176 comments were made in praise of the Agora as a showcase/outlet for talented PLATO members.

Comments from those who rated it less than 6 on a 10 point scale: Of the 270 commenters, most noted that they don't read it; aren't interested in the subject or have other/better reading options. However of these, about 20% included statements supporting the Agora as an outlet for those who appreciate it. Here's an example. "Personally, I have more things to read than I can keep up with and am not likely to read much of this. That said, I value having opportunities for people who are authors and artists to publish and share their work and fully support keeping up the publication."

Want to receive a print edition: Of the 635 responders, 56% said no; 44% said yes.

How much of membership dues should be allocated to print The Agora: Of the 600 responders, 31% said none, but almost 69% said \$5 to \$15 should be allocated.

Viewership of weekly postings online: Of the 632 responders 25% had looked at least once at the online posting. 33% of those who had looked at it said they did so weekly or regularly.

Comments about the weekly postings online: Of the 12 comments, most liked it with one saying it was a better outlet than the print option; another few said they had no time for it, didn't know about it or didn't find it well done.

Considerations: *The interesting dichotomy here is that even though most of the responders are not interested in receiving a print copy of The Agora and most don't read the publication they are supportive of the opportunity for others, even to the extent that 69% of respondents are willing to have some of their dues support the publication. The Agora has an opportunity to find efficiencies in reducing the number of printed copies and not arbitrarily sending them to every PLATO member, while enjoying the relatively broad support of PLATO members to continue its work.*

► **Interest in getting information about volunteer opportunities:**

30 members provided their e-mail address asking for more information about opportunities to coordinate a course. 57 members provided the same asking for more information about serving on a committee. The most frequently requested committees were Curriculum (46%) and Special Events (23%).

Considerations: *The annual survey continues to be an effective way to identify members who want to learn more about getting involved in PLATO and should be a continued feature of future surveys.*