

PLATO Board of Directors Meeting, December 8, 2023

Approved February 9, 2024

Board Present: Rod McKenzie, Mike Kernats, Kathy Brown, Jatinder Cheema, Tim Otis, Steve Sparks, Jack Mitchell, MaryJo MacSwain, Marian Fisher, Gail Bergman, Tobey Marsceill, Dory Christensen and Edie Urness-Pondillo. Nancy McClements attended to represent the Special Events Committee. PLATO Staff: Stephanie Steigerwaldt.

Membership: 772 Members; 219 Lapsed Members

1) **Approval of Draft Board Meeting Minutes** from October 13, 2023 – Motion made to approve and passed.

2) **Treasurer's Update:** Jatinder Cheema shared the Bank Accounts as of December 5, 2023:

- Money Market \$17,698
- CD \$15,317.74
- Reserve \$601.00
- Checking \$116,545

Cheema noted that we are about \$10,000 short in terms of income to reach our budget goals but because we have 3 quarters left, we should be able to resolve this shortfall. Tim Otis asked whether we had been reimbursed by the UW Foundation and Cheema responded no, and that we need to follow up with them. Mike Kernats mentioned that we received a \$10,000 donation which helps. Rod McKenzie explained that the accrual accounting method PLATO uses makes it difficult to understand our financial reporting and that our small size makes this unnecessary. Cheema said that the soon-to-meet Finance Committee will research and discuss alternate accounting methods to share with the Board for consideration. McKenzie encouraged committee chairs to see the Kollath Q1 Summary as it provides line-item expenditures so they can see what they have spent thus far. Jack Mitchell pointed out that we based our current budget on an unrealistic number of members (1,085) and hopes we don't do it again.

Tobey Marsceill asked for clarification on the interest income. Cheema clarified these numbers explaining that we don't touch the Money Market, CD or Reserve for daily operations. We operate solely out of the Checking account. Cheema also pointed out that expenditures are down because we aren't doing as many trips.

Stephanie Steigerwaldt said that if this year follows the patterns of past years that we are still likely to pick up around 175 additional members but that the amount of income this brings in varies depending on what time of the year members join so it is unpredictable.

McKenzie reminded the Board that the best way of recruiting is to invite a friend to a PLATO course, lecture, social event, etc. and we need marketing materials and messaging that communicates this. MaryJo MacSwain added that we need to develop a campaign that encourages members to reach out to friends and family by "Doing These Three Things: 1) forward the Weekly Update to someone who may be interested, 2) share PLATO on Next Door, 3) share PLATO with your networks (e.g. places of

worship). Sparks said there are 172 suggestions from the Annual Member Satisfaction Survey that can help guide us!

3) Committee Items

Curriculum Committee: Kathy Brown provided the Curriculum Committee update on behalf of Kathie Burman. There will be nine winter courses – 7 in-person and 2 virtual. This number is up from recent years.

Planning for Spring Courses is also well underway; however, the course offerings are down – there are only 30 currently lined up. There is a great range of topics, and the Curriculum Committee is working hard to recruit new coordinators. Tim Otis asked if it is possible to give coordinators more time to prepare for the spring semester as the current timeframe doesn't allow much turnaround time between semesters. It was also acknowledged that the holidays are a busy time. Tobey Marsceill pointed out that there are two "hidden" winter courses, meaning that there are fall courses that are carrying over into winter that aren't listed. Could carryover courses be listed in the future? MaryJo MacSwain asked if going forward we could distinguish between new classes and repeat classes? Stephanie Steigerwaldt said that she is getting more efficient with the production of the Course Schedule webpage and could work with Curriculum leadership to reduce the time needed on her end to afford coordinators more time for the turnaround in course submission. Brown said that she will take all these suggestions back to the Curriculum Committee. There were reminders that everyone is encouraged to reach out to fellow classmates to encourage other members to consider offering a course and that courses do not have to be 10 weeks long.

Diversity Committee: MacSwain noted the committee is dedicated to expanding the scope of diverse topics covered, highlighting that this fall they offered a course on the topic of poverty. Next fall MacSwain will offer a course on feminism and planning for 2025 is underway.

Fall lectures included the topics of early childhood education and the Holocaust – the latter of which was held at Oakwood West and had approximately 100 people in attendance! Dory Christensen pointed out that the presenters of *From the Holocaust to Civil Rights* are willing to present to any group that is interested in hosting them – especially high schools. Tim Otis said that the session was recorded, and Stephanie Steigerwaldt will try to find the link to share with PLATO members on YouTube and follow up with Oakwood staff if need be.

Fund Development: Tim Otis shared that the Market value of the fund is: \$171,466.95 as of 9/30/23 and explained that the market value does not yet show Plato Fund Expenses for FY 2022, contributions made by PLATO to community organizations, and contributions to UW programs directly from the PLATO Fund. It is expected that the market value will be reduced once they are recognized in the UW Foundation Financial Reporting System.

In terms of donations, we are having a good year, but not a great year. 52 donors have given \$13,794. Tim encouraged members to "give early and give often".

Membership & Communications (M&C): Steve Sparks reported that the M&C Committee met on December 4, 2023, and that recent focus has been on member retention. An email was sent to lapsed members which included a survey asking why these lapsed members were not renewing their membership. Five people rejoined because of the email and 14 others responded to the survey. It was useful to see the reasons they offered which were consistent with what we typically hear. Besides death, the most frequently cited reasons for not renewing include health issues, no longer driving, and relocation.

Annual Member Satisfaction Survey highlights: this year we sent the survey to members only – note that last year we sent it to members and lapsed members. We had a 58.8% response rate which is outstanding. Typical responses rates for similar member organizations are 10-30%. Overall satisfaction is very high. The demographics of our responders show us that our responders are aging as is the number of years they have been members. This also tells us that we need to focus some attention on attracting younger members.

The most popular offerings are 1) courses, 2) lectures, and 3) the Weekly Update. The least popular offerings include social events, the Education Fund and The Agora (though Sparks emphasized that it's all relative – that the latter three are much appreciated by many members)

The survey helped us identify that eight members are interested in learning more about joining the Curriculum Committee; three people are interested in the Diversity Committee, 10 people are interested in Special Events, and 11 are interested in coordinating a course. Sparks will share these names with appropriate committee chairs.

The survey report was 79 pages long because members had so much to say about PLATO! So the consultants used ChatGPT to summarize those comments. While the summary is useful, especially in terms of offering suggestions about how to reach out to new members, some pieces of it are a little misleading as this is imperfect technology. Sparks will continue to comb through the 1,068 responses as his time allows.

Sparks asked if Board members would be interested in reading the 79-page document. Tobey Marsceill said that she would like to read it. Rod McKenzie said that names would have to be redacted to protect member privacy.

Marsceill asked how many lapsed member emails were sent. Stephanie Steigerwaldt replied that around 230-ish were sent and there were 14 responses. Sparks shared that in January we will be sending out another email which will include lapsed members as well as PLATO “contacts” with the reminder that memberships are half-price through the end of the membership year.

Marsceill asked about business cards as she will be starting to do presentations at various senior living communities and needs marketing collateral pieces to hand out. MaryJo MacSwain said that she would like to have three items to use as promotional pieces for various purposes: an 8.5”x11” color flyer, a brochure (like what we have now), and a business card.

Sparks closed by saying that new member recruitment will be a main topic of the next M&C Committee meeting in February 2024, as well as developing appropriate marketing materials to achieve the goals that are under development.

Special Events (SEC): Nancy McClements represented SEC and reported that *Scrooge, The Musical* had 31 attendees and that members were excited to try The Fireside Theater as a new venue. *The Chosen* at the Milwaukee Rep on March 27, 2024, will be the next theater trip and will be announced later this month. There will be more walking tour field trips offered at Epic this winter as they are being received so well.

Lectures – there have been suggestions for lectures, but no one is stepping up to coordinate them.

Annual Meeting – no one is interested/able to reserve the room.

Facebook postings: Stephanie is doing a nice job with the graphic postings.

Breakfasts: Sharon Scratish will continue to host second Friday Breakfast Gatherings. Fourth Friday Breakfast Gatherings are discontinued until January 26, 2024.

Website Development: Bob and Nancy working with Barb Rust to standardize formatting.

4) Ad Hoc Committee Items:

Nominating Committee: Kathy Brown is leading this effort as a part of past president duties. Brown reminded the Board that there are three categories of Board leadership: Officers (1-year terms), At-Large members (3-year terms) and Committee Chairs (no term limit and appointed by committee members).

Please send Brown names of potential new leaders and Board members need to let her know if they are not planning to continue in their leadership role in 24-2025.

Timeline of communications to PLATO membership:

- January: Invite members to submit names of potential new leaders.
- March: Nominating Committee shares the slate of candidates with the Executive Committee.
- April: Executive Committee shares the slate of candidates with the Board for approval.
- May: General Election.
- July: Election results announced.

Rod McKenzie thanked Brown for her efforts on this project.

The meeting adjourned at 11:03 am.

The next PLATO board meeting is scheduled for February 9, 2024, via Google Meet.