A Message from the President:

Transition Time —by Marvin Beatty

The transition from winter to spring outside my window exemplifies the process that PLATO is also experiencing. At our luncheon on May 24th new officers and members of the Board of Directors were elected and will take on their new roles July 1st. Less visible transitions occur in PLATO all the time. We keep getting more members and adding new programmatic offerings. (But not enough new programs to keep up with membership growth.)

Our long-term partner, the Division of Continuing Studies at UW-Madison is making a transition toward a new dean, as Marvin Van Kekerix makes the transition to being Chancellor of UW-Extension and UW-Colleges. He has been a strong partner as we and DCS have worked with the Osher Foundation.

Since last fall your Board of Directors has been involved in developing a Strategic Plan for the five-year period from 2010 to 2015. More than 40 members of PLATO invested two Saturdays in defining the most important issues facing the organization, the goals we want the organization to achieve as we deal with those issues and the actions needed to achieve those goals. If you attended the annual luncheon on May 24th or the business meeting on June 2nd you heard about the issues, goals and actions your organization will begin to undertake. I hope you will become involved and help us achieve our goals.

At the Strategic Planning session we refreshed our understanding of just how central to PLATO (Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization) the participatory concept is. Some members participate by initiating, organizing, coordinating, and teaching our ~30 ten-week programs. Others participate by taking active part in the discussions and/or by organizing one of our summer offerings of shorter duration. Others participate by being members of committees or of the board of directors. We aren’t and don’t want to become an organization of passive learners. To avoid that we need more members for these leadership roles, so please consider your talents and volunteer to be an active member.

Your incoming president, Judy Sadowsky, is an active member par excellence. She brings long experience as chair of the Curriculum Committee to the job, along with active participation in our study/discussion group on philosophy, summer programs and more. She’ll be a great leader.

It’s been both a pleasure and an honor to serve as your president this year. The time has flown by. And I believe we are a stronger organization as this year transitions to the next.

Membership Renewal Notice

It’s time to renew your annual PLATO membership for the 2010–2011 membership year. Dues will remain just $50, which means your membership is about the best bargain in town. We offer two ways to renew:

By Mail: Complete the Membership Form included in this newsletter, with your name, current mailing address, phone number and e-mail address, so our recordkeeping can remain up-to-date and accurate. Make your check payable to UW-Madison and mail the completed Membership Form and your check to UW-Madison Continuing Studies, 21 N. Park St., 7th Floor, Attn: Wendy Kerr, Madison, WI 53715.

Online: Access PLATO’s Web site at www.seniorlearning.wisc.edu, click on the link for online membership, and complete the online Membership Form. Only credit cards can be used for online registration.

PLATO encourages use of online renewal. It saves administrative time and cost, and makes recordkeeping easier. Last year about 20% of our members used this method. Our goal this year is to raise that figure to 35%. So do give it a try. You’ll find it an easy and friendly way to go, and you’ll be helping to keep the lid on our administrative costs.
**Partnership Yields a “Positive” Result**

This summer, PLATO members and others in the Madison area have been enjoying a new lecture series that explores the latest research about health, well-being and quality of life related to positive aging.

The aptly-named “Positive Aging Lecture Series” is a collaborative effort from Continuing Studies, SAIL (Supporting Active Independent Lives), and Oakwood Village. It features leading UW-Madison faculty and staff from various health-related disciplines. For seven Fridays, beginning June 4 and extending through August, UW experts share information about timely topics such as: improving physical and psychological well-being, mental exercise and positive aging, and conversations to have with your doctor. The series has been very well-received, with more than 150 people attending each lecture so far.

The idea of a lecture series focused on positive aging came out of discussions between Ann Albert, director of SAIL, and Sarah Schutt, director of senior learning, Continuing Studies. “Ann and I recognized that we each work with a group of engaged members who are interested in promoting mental and physical well-being,” said Sarah. “While our organizations typically go about it in different ways, the topics covered in this series are a perfect intersection of our interests.”

Ann added, “Most SAIL members value lifelong learning and many are intrigued with aging itself. They understand (and actually live) the concept ‘you can’t change the wind but you can adjust your sail.’ The lecture series helps increase the knowledge we have about positive aging. Having the opportunity to connect with UW-Madison Continuing Studies was very appealing and we’re excited to be involved.”

Also cosponsoring the series is Oakwood Village West, which allows use of their auditorium for the series. Several PLATO members reside at Oakwood and attend the lectures. A final partner, Wisconsin Public Television, has been recording each lecture for future broadcast on its University Place program.

For Continuing Studies, this lecture series represents its ongoing commitment to senior learning, and the effort to complement PLATO’s participatory programs. It is an example of seeking partnerships and creating new programs that tap into the resources of UW-Madison to serve area senior learners. For SAIL, the lectures are another way to meet the needs of the growing population of seniors, and improve the quality of care provided to them.

SAIL is a nonprofit membership organization of people 55+ who live in the Madison area. It began in 2005 and is now part of a national “village” movement that consists of more than 50 other membership programs, similar to SAIL. Through a variety of prevention-based services, social programs and staff interactions, SAIL membership becomes a trusted relationship that is much appreciated, especially during trying times members periodically face.

The program is designed for people who are active and independent which keeps overhead low yet allows for the personal touch. This model aligns with the current national focus on prevention and pre-planning. Currently, about 12% of SAIL members are members of PLATO. For more information about SAIL, visit its Web site: sailtoday.org.

To participate in the remaining “Positive Aging” lectures (July 16 and 23, August 6 and 20), visit seniorlearning.wisc.edu to register online or call Wendy at 262-5823.

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**PLATO Scholarships Support Exceptional Students**

PLATO’s financial contribution to UW-Madison helps provide key funds to three returning adult students with exceptional qualifications and needs.

This year, PLATO donated $3,000 to UW-Madison Continuing Studies for scholarships. These funds help Sarah Brown and Lisa Malmo, both single parents, as they pursue professional degrees. Sarah’s desire is to earn a degree in social welfare so she can become part of the solution. Lisa currently has an associate degree in nursing and will be working toward a master’s degree in nursing education so that she can become an instructor.

The stories of these two women are moving and inspiring. This PLATO program adds a very special dimension to our endeavor of Participatory Learning and Teaching by enabling these individuals to participate in learning.

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**Coming Events**

**Bus Trip: Old Wade House**  
Wed., July 21

**Senior Guest Auditor Information Session**  
Wed., August 11; 1:30 to 3:00 pm  
Capitol Lakes–Grand Hall

**Bus Trip: Chicago Botanic Garden**  
Wed., August 18

**What’s All the Fuss about Facebook?**  
Thurs., August 26; 1:30 to 3:00 pm  
21 N. Park Street, Room 1106/1108

**PLATO Fall Preview**  
Wed., September 15; 1:30 to 3:00 pm  
Downtown Madison Senior Center
What Happened to OLLI? —by Sarah Schutt, Director of Senior Learning

At the Annual Luncheon on May 24, incoming PLATO President Judy Sadowsky announced, “OLLI is no more.” The relationship with OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) has been a source of confusion and some upset for the past couple of years, yet this sudden turn of events has led many to wonder, “What happened to OLLI?”

Continuing Studies at UW-Madison affiliated with the San Francisco-based Bernard Osher Foundation in 2005 to create the “Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UW-Madison (UW OLLI)”; the purpose of which was to provide university-based lifelong learning opportunities for “senior” adults. Since then, $300,000 in grant funding has been received by Continuing Studies to support senior learning programming, including PLATO.

Budget reductions in the past few years impaired the ability of Continuing Studies to continue supporting PLATO. The primary reason for establishing UW OLLI was to secure a permanent endowment from the Osher Foundation. Without the security of a permanent funding source, the division’s ability to support PLATO, and the future of our 23-year relationship were in serious jeopardy. As a result, in the summer of 2009, PLATO became “a program of OLLI” to comply with funding requirements set by the Osher Foundation, and to ensure financial support and security within Continuing Studies.

At the end of April, 2010, we learned that the Osher Foundation had declined our application for a permanent endowment. Their concerns were related to the programming available through OLLI, and with our relationship with PLATO. We learned that when an OLLI is created at an institution with an existing “senior learning” group, there are two acceptable models to remain eligible for continued funding from the Osher Foundation:

• The existing group chooses to become OLLI (like the Guild did in Milwaukee)
• The existing group remains independent but becomes “a program of OLLI”

Last year, PLATO chose the second model, and became “PLATO—a program of OLLI”, maintaining its organizational independence and programming autonomy. The resulting expectation was for OLLI to develop a robust body of university-related programs, distinctly branded as “OLLI” programs, and offered exclusively to members. This simply was not possible for us.

Continuing Studies has long been a pioneer in lifelong learning. We have an academic department, Liberal Studies and the Arts, which offers hundreds of noncredit, enrichment courses and programs, the content of which fits exactly into the expectations of the Osher Foundation. However, the unique funding structure in place to support those Continuing Studies courses actually prevents offering them “exclusively” to members. Alternatively, to create a new, separate body of programming specifically for members would be to unnecessarily duplicate programs already being offered. We were not in a position to pursue either of those options related to programming.

The only option remaining to secure endowment funding from the Osher Foundation was the first: for PLATO to become OLLI and to relinquish its name and its 501c7 status. Continuing Studies Dean Mary Van Keerix has said repeatedly that our long-standing relationship with PLATO is more important to us than affiliation with the Osher Foundation. We decided that if the situation required choosing between the Osher Foundation and PLATO, we (Continuing Studies) would choose PLATO. That’s what we did.

As of June 30, 2010, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UW-Madison will cease to exist. Work has begun to “unhitch” OLLI, and plans are being made for Continuing Studies to move forward with senior learning in collaboration with PLATO. We feel good about the decision, and believe that operating as a DCS-PLATO two-some will provide more flexibility and more opportunities to collaborate in support of senior learning.

While the OLLI journey was challenging, it also yielded positive benefits. The generous funding received over the past five years made possible a significant level of administrative and staff support for senior learning and PLATO. It also gave rise to some familiar programs that continue to this day, including Wednesday Nite @ the Lab, the Global Hot Spots lecture series, and Made in Wisconsin bus tours, along with online courses, and various other programs and initiatives.

Being part of the OLLI national network positioned senior learning as a priority within Continuing Studies and ensured an institutional commitment to providing enrichment opportunities for older adults.

While the outcome initially was disappointing, it is for the best, and our parting from the Osher Foundation is an amicable one. As we move forward, Continuing Studies’ interest in senior learning remains strong, as does the commitment to and support of PLATO.

Bits and Pieces

Do we have your e-mail address?
If the answer is “no”, then you could be missing out on PLATO information and updates.

In addition to our weekly e-mail to members, we’re using e-mail more frequently to communicate with you about reminders and program confirmations. Use of e-mail allows flexibility and reduces mailing costs. So, if you use e-mail, please make sure that Wendy has your e-mail address by e-mailing her at wkerr@dcs.wisc.edu (better than calling!). If you don’t use e-mail, we’ll still make every effort to communicate essential information by U.S. mail.

Finding Wendy...We’re always happy to help you with photocopying, ordering supplies and other tasks to support the work of PLATO. You can help us help you by letting us know ahead of time what sort of assistance you need and your timeline.

It works best when you call or e-mail in advance so we can be available.

There is a lot happening at Continuing Studies, and sometimes meetings, other projects, and occasionally a vacation day pull us away from our desks, phones and the ability to respond immediately to your requests.

If you can’t reach Wendy, Sarah is happy to help anytime and can be reached at 262-5699. Thanks!
Our Participatory Learning and Teaching Organization—PLATO—is thriving. We are benefiting from changing national and local demographics and the support provided by the University’s expanded programs for lifelong learning.

However, there are challenges as well as opportunities associated with growth and change. PLATO is addressing these issues in a long-range strategic planning initiative led by a Strategic Planning Committee which is chaired by George Rueckert. In April, about 50% of the membership responded to a survey assessing their perceptions and expectations of PLATO.

With guidance from an expert consultant team, a two-day Strategic Planning Conference, involving a group of past, current, and potential leaders of PLATO, was held to consider the results of the recent member survey and responses to a similar leadership survey. This was all part of charting a strategic direction for PLATO during the next five years.

Challenges and opportunities addressed at the conference were many; they included: managing growth while maintaining the unique participatory and teaching nature of PLATO, broadening versus maintaining program focus, nurturing leadership to enable expansion/diversification of programming, bringing communication more inline with the information technology age, increasing the diversity of participants, and maximizing the benefits of our collaboration with UW-Madison Continuing Studies.

The results of the membership survey and Strategic Planning Conference are currently being reviewed, compiled and refined by the Strategic Planning Committee and the PLATO Board. Recommendations for action were presented to the membership at the June 2 Annual Business Meeting and will be published in the August issue of The Persimmon.

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**Update on Strategic Planning Conference (held April, 2010) —by Pat Becker**

**Summary of Annual All-Member Luncheon May 24, 2010 —by Tim Otis, president-elect**

About 200 people attended the Annual PLATO All-Member Luncheon which was held at a new location—the Marriott West—on May 24. This group was somewhat smaller than last year, but those who attended enjoyed the comfortable surroundings and the fellowship of other PLATO members.

**Some highlights of the luncheon are:**

- The Election of Officers and Directors 2010-2011
  - **Judy Sadowsky** President
  - **Tim Otis** President-Elect
  - **Pat Becker** Secretary
  - **Ved Prakash** Treasurer
  - **Harold Green** Director at Large
  - **Jean Blake** Director at Large

- **Paul Hartwig** and **Bruce Gregg** were each honored for their many years of leadership and service to PLATO.

- **Sarah Brown** and **Lisa Malmo** were honored as the PLATO scholarship recipients for adults returning to finish their college degrees.

- **Luncheon speaker, Russell Panczenko**, gave a very informative talk about the significant expansion of the Chazen Museum of Art, including the architecture, the art collections to be added, and the timeline for the facility’s opening.

- **Judy Sadowsky** closed the luncheon by thanking Marv Beatty for his service as the 09–10 PLATO president, and charged the membership with: “Ask not what PLATO can do for you, but what you can do for PLATO.”

The PLATO Board decided to hold the luncheon in a different venue, mainly because of parking and access concerns. Because of this, the Special Events Committee was interested in evaluating this choice. Based on evaluations from the attendees, it appears the majority was satisfied or very satisfied (94% for access and 99% for parking). Also, 94% thought the location was satisfactory or very satisfactory.

There were good reviews for the menu, with a few concerns being expressed about service and quality. The speaker was generally well received, although some were concerned about the length of the talk and about some technical issues that affected the speaker’s volume.

Approximately 80% of the attendees filled out the evaluation form giving us a good idea about how attendees felt about the event. Since fewer people attended this year vs. last year (200 vs. 230), one may think the increased distance may have dissuaded some potential participants. Overall, this year's luncheon was very successful as the PLATO membership celebrated this unique and vibrant organization. The luncheon sub-committee of the Special Events Committee did its usual superb job of handling registration, decorations, etc.