

## PLANETARIUM LEARNING AND TEACHING (PLATO) GRANTS

**Chuck Bueter**  
3811 W. Valley Dr.  
Fairview Park, OH 44126  
*cbueter111@aol.com*

**Dr. Bernhard Beck-Winchatz**  
NASA Space Science Center for Education and Outreach  
DePaul University  
990 W. Fullerton, Suite 4400  
Chicago, IL, 60614  
*bbeck@condor.depaul.edu*

**Abstract: NASA Office of Space Science will fund at least fifteen awards of up to one thousand dollars each for planetarium-based projects that enhance the public's appreciation and understanding of astronomy. Proposals submitted for Planetarium Learning And Teaching Opportunity (PLATO) grants, which are being offered only to GLPA members and persons affiliated with GLPA member institutions, must be postmarked by February 16, 2001.**

### Introduction

At the last meeting of the Great Lakes Planetarium Association in Kalamazoo, Bernhard Beck-Winchatz gave a talk entitled "NASA Office of Space Science Education and Outreach" (*Proceedings of the 35th Annual GLPA Conference*, p.1). He presented some of the resources that NASA has developed for the planetarium community and expressed NASA's desire to work more closely with GLPA to better meet the needs of planetarium educators. A direct outcome of the discussion after the talk was the formation of an Advisory Committee consisting of GLPA members and NASA OSS staff under the leadership of Jeanne Bishop.

This committee has met several times by telephone conference to discuss issues related to the use of NASA resources in planetariums and the formation of partnerships between planetarians and NASA scientists and educators. We created a web site ([http://analyzer.depaul.edu/glpa\\_oss](http://analyzer.depaul.edu/glpa_oss)) to document our work, and communicate via a listserv ([glpa\\_oss@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:glpa_oss@madison.k12.wi.us)) managed by Geoff Holt.

The work of the committee has yielded some very encouraging early results: Gary Sampson gave a presentation entitled "Collaborations between Small and Medium Planetariums and NASA" at the pre-conference workshop of the 2000 Lunar and Planetary Science Conference in Houston, Texas. We formed a partnership between GLPA and scientists from the University of Wisconsin to develop an education component specifically targeted at small and medium planetariums for a proposed Venus orbiter mission.

At this year's conference we are presenting to the GLPA community two internet-based resources currently under development, and are seeking feedback and suggestions from

GLPA members. The NASA Space Science Education Resource Directory (<http://teachspacescience.stsci.edu>) is a powerful tool for educators that allows them to quickly locate resources on the internet through searches by keyword, browsing, and advanced search capabilities. The Space Science Access web site (<http://cfa-www.harvard.edu/seuforum/wateringHole>) is a place where staff from planetariums and science museums as well as scientists can find resources for museum and planetarium professionals and partners for informal science projects, and share best practices.

### PLATO Grants

During teleconferences with participants from NASA Office of Space Science and the Great Lakes Planetarium Association, GLPA members conveyed that many planetariums struggle with inadequate staffing and funding, or what Jon Marshall calls "a zero-or-less budget." One of three direct outcomes of that liaison is the creation of several grants for the Great Lakes planetarium community.

We are pleased to announce that NASA's Office of Space Science, through its Broker/Facilitator arrangement at DePaul University, will fund at least fifteen awards of up to one thousand dollars each for planetarium-based projects that enhance the public's appreciation and understanding of astronomy. More specifically, the Planetarium Learning And Teaching Opportunity (PLATO) grants are being offered only to you—Great Lakes Planetarium Association members and persons affiliated with GLPA member institutions.

The goals of these grants are multi-fold. First and foremost is the desire to promote astronomy education through effective planetarium offerings. On another level, however, is the desire to assist individual planetarians in becoming

successful grantseekers. The PLATO grants have a streamlined application process to expedite your applying.

To maximize impact of the grants, recipients are asked to submit a final report, which includes both a project evaluation and a description, or model that other planetarians can use to replicate successful astronomy education projects. Replication is desirable. If you design a worthwhile project, we would like others to be able to access it. Smaller facilities may only reach one hundred people. But if that small facility writes a descriptive summary that allows others to emulate its work, it has created a favorable return on the investment.

PLATO grant applications parallel typical funding requirements, as outlined in its Call for Proposals, but with less rigidity. Requests for funding should include:

- a cover sheet with the title of the project and a half-page project summary,
- the body of the proposal not to exceed three pages (double-spaced) in length,
- a budget page that identifies how funds will be spent and notes any other funds allocated to the project, both direct and in-kind.

The body of the proposal should describe the project procedures and timeline; the project objectives and intended outcome; the intended audience and the key staff/collaborators; the project evaluation plan; and the intended return to other astronomy educators.

Favorable consideration will be given to replicable projects and projects that engage underrepresented and underserved populations (e.g., rural populations, the disabled, ethnic minorities, women, community colleges) as defined by the Office of Space Science. For reference, see FAQ #15 at [http://ssibroker.colorado.edu/broker/eval\\_criteria/Guide/](http://ssibroker.colorado.edu/broker/eval_criteria/Guide/).

Whereas DePaul does not insist on limiting the amount requested, proposals for more than \$1,000.00 will need to be especially deserving to receive full funding, will require a more formal evaluation, and are subject to more rigorous scrutiny. Refer to FAQ #13 at [http://ssibroker.colorado.edu/broker/eval\\_criteria/Guide/](http://ssibroker.colorado.edu/broker/eval_criteria/Guide/) for evaluation guidance.

Notification of grants will be made around the vernal equinox. The two-page final report of how the money was spent (project/budget summary of one page, evaluation summary of one page) is expected one year later.

To apply for a PLATO grant, submit either an original and six copies of the proposal or submit a MSWord version on a floppy disk with one hard copy, postmarked by February 16, 2000, to:

NASA Center for Education and Outreach  
PLATO Committee  
DePaul University  
990 W. Fullerton, Suite 4400  
Chicago, IL, 60614

The language of the PLATO grant is similar to that of the V. M. Slipper grant, so one PLATO write-up is good for two grant applications. Having secured a PLATO grant, you will be able to demonstrate to other parties, such as the IDEAS grant, that your project merited funding from additional sources and is building leverage. And, frankly, for persons who are not comfortable with the grant writing process, the PLATO grants are an opportunity to try your hand at solicitation.

On this latter subject, I do not mean to dismiss the skilled writers here who are accomplished fundraisers. Many of you are intimately familiar with the demands of appealing to philanthropic institutions. But here is where this grant—and you—can aid a larger audience.

The PLATO grants are not limited to career planetarians. The language is deliberately open to permit individuals affiliated with GLPA member institutions to submit funding requests. This pool of potential grantseekers includes your students, your membership rolls, your visitors, science fair participants who seek your guidance—anyone legitimately linked with your facility who can help others appreciate and understand the firmament.

Every year we are fortunate that Gregg Williams brings a cadre of students to participate in this conference. You students of Merrillville are perfect candidates to apply for a PLATO grant—and on your own merits. Though Mr. Williams may offer you assistance, this can be your initiative, your project.

You may have to learn some standard practices in, say, the evaluation process; don't worry, you are not alone. By conducting some evaluation you will benefit in at least two ways. First, you will end up with a better product. Second, you will become more skilled and more comfortable in grantwriting, which will always serve you well.

If response to the PLATO grants is favorable and the 2001 cycle of awards are deemed valuable, NASA Space Science, through its DePaul affiliation, may renew the multiple PLATO grants. That will depend on your replies.

Again, only GLPA members and persons affiliated with GLPA member institutions are eligible for these grants. This is a direct outcome of the dialogue between you members and Bernhard that occurred during and after last year's conference. I urge you to visit the NASA folks again, today and tomorrow, in the Cyberspace Room on the Mid-Level, for they have proven that a relationship with them can yield tangible rewards for us, the Great Lakes planetarium community.