



THE VOICE

USM ASSOCIATION OF OFFICE PROFESSIONALS

2024, Volume 1 Spring 2024

The Voice is the semi-annual newsletter of the University of Southern Mississippi Association of Office Professionals. The mission of AOP is to provide opportunities for communication and relationship-building among staff members of the University of Southern Mississippi.

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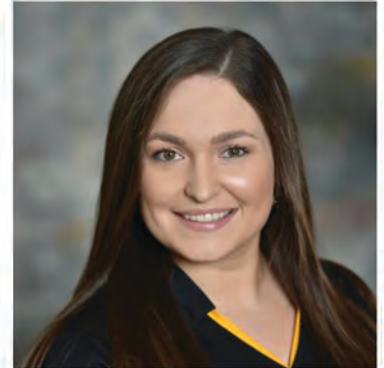
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Message From the President



Joyce Powell, Ed.D., CEOE
President, USM Association of Office Professionals

I hope this message finds you well and thriving this semester! As we continue the academic year, I want to reflect on the tagline we adopted in August, "facilitating CPR for the staff members of The University of Southern Mississippi." What does this mean for our organization?

Community Service

Making a positive impact beyond our offices is an area where I believe AOP excels. I am continually blown away by our members' giving spirits. This year, we have continued to enhance our community service efforts and engage more actively with the community. Stay tuned for more ways you can get involved.

Professional Development

Continuous learning is key to our personal and professional growth. I also believe it is essential to workplace engagement. AOP plays an important role in organizing professional development opportunities for the university community. We had a great series of workshops in the Fall semester, and I look forward to more opportunities for growth in the Spring semester!

Relationship Building

Relationships are essential to the success of our organization (and, I believe, to life overall). I have formed many great friendships and working relationships with people I would never have met if it weren't for AOP. If that was all that I gained from AOP, I would be grateful. This spring, we will continue to offer ways for you to connect with colleagues across departments. Let's continue to create a supportive environment that fosters collaboration and camaraderie!

As we pass the halfway point of the academic year, I am confident that we have made progress in all of these areas. This newsletter is showcase of what we have accomplished so far, but let's continue to work hard and persist in our efforts. Thank you for your contributions to AOP - you are truly making a difference at the university and in your community!

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usm.edu/association-office-professionals

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What AOP Means to its Members

We polled our members to learn why they joined AOP and what their membership means to them. Here's what they said. by Dena Temple

We each have our story about how we came to be AOP members, and what membership means to us. We asked our members to share their experience through a short survey, and the only surprise was that there was not one negative comment, even though members had the option of remaining anonymous.

The questions were fairly straightforward. How long have you been a member? How did you hear about AOP? Why did you join? How has AOP affected your career or work experience? The answers confirm what we as members already know: AOP is a positive influence on us.

Respondents have worked at USM an average of seven years. Most learned about AOP from a co-worker; they joined primarily for professional development or because it was recommended by

an existing member (88%), for networking (75%), or the PSP program (75%); one respondent wrote in "personal growth."

The next question asked, "How has AOP enriched your life?" Members were quick to mention networking, particularly between USM locations. One respondent noted that the "meaningful work relationships" she's established through AOP help her work more efficiently. A member who works at Stennis noted, "being part of AOP has really helped me make connections with USM staff at every location." A majority of members also mentioned how the professional development programs enrich their work experience. One noted USM is the "first place I've worked that offers professional development on a regular basis."

The next question asked about other ways AOP has benefited its

members. It's no surprise that programs and professional development were the top answers, followed by increased salary, networking, motivation, leadership skills, and teamwork. One respondent added, "I liked when the MAEOP conference was held on the Hattiesburg campus. That was a fun, professional day!"

Not all participants added a personal comment, but those who did were unanimous in their appreciation for AOP. One said, "I urge all members to get involved with one of the AOP committees. Participation gives you an opportunity to use skills you don't get to use in your job." Another respondent said, "I believe the University should support (AOP) more. A lot of people don't know about it."

The last respondent's response was short and sweet but says it all: "AOP is a wonderful organization!"

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In which AOP activities have you participated?



ABOVE - Surveyors were asked a series of questions about their participation in AOP activities. The results show that our professional development programs and the recent MAEOP seminar were the most popular.



Earning More Through Learning More by Cory Williams, PSP Liaison

One of the most valuable perks of AOP membership is the Professional Standards, or PSP, Program. Offered by the National Association of Educational Office Professionals, the PSP Program provides a structure to guide members as they approach their professional and personal development. Members complete education requirements through college classes, conference attendance, seminars, and workshops that help them develop valuable skills. It also allows members to build leadership skills by participating in local and state affiliates. Members can serve on or chair committees, present workshops, or serve as an association officer to complete program requirements.

The PSP program has been around for decades and has evolved to better serve members. A couple of years ago, changes were made to the college class requirements that greatly simplified the education

requirements. Just last month, new changes were approved that better defined how part-time employment meets the employment requirements and increased the credit earned for leading workshops. If there are topics that you are passionate and knowledgeable about, we are always looking for workshop ideas.

Now is a good time to consider how members can best participate in AOP while meeting their own goals. Consider chairing or serving on a committee next year, presenting a workshop, or running for office in AOP. These are all great opportunities to create connections across campus and develop leadership skills.

For more information about the PSP program, visit the AOP website. If you have any questions, contact me at cory.smith@usm.edu, or call (601) 266-9999.



AOP Elections Coming

The membership of AOP holds annual elections to fill the offices of president-elect, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The president-elect becomes president upon the completion of the current president's term, and the current president succeeds to immediate past president. This is considered the Board of AOP.

All officers serve for one year, except the treasurer, who serves a two-year term.

The nomination process took place earlier this year. Watch your emailboxes for information on the nominees and a link to the ballot.

We thank all those who choose to serve AOP in the coming year.

Recent PSP Certifications

Basic	Geneal Washam
Associates Degree Certificate	Dr. Joyce Powell
Advanced III	Cindy Walker
Certified Educational Office Employee (CEOE)	Dr. Joyce Powell Cindy Walker



Let's Get to Know Geneal Washam

AOP's President-Elect has a head for numbers and a heart full of ambition.

by Dena Temple

Geneal Washam has a head for numbers. Her love for finance and budgeting was evident in her previous career as an accounting auditor at Ellisville (Miss.) State School, and now she's pursuing her degree in Business Administration with an emphasis on Entrepreneurship to take her career to the next level.

In fact, Geneal will graduate from Southern Miss on May 10, and her son, Alex, 21, will graduate with his Associate's degree in Health & Science from Meridian Community College the same day. You can bet that Geneal's other children, Alaysia (18) and Joseph (14) will be cheering them on. Alaysia will graduate from high school in May as well – clearly, achievement runs in Geneal's family!

Geneal Washam was born and raised in Waynesboro, MS, and today lives in Hattiesburg. Since 2019, Geneal served as office manager for fraternity/ sorority life on the Hattiesburg campus of USM. Just before we went to press, she announced that she has been promoted to Student Life Budget Manager, where she gets to feed her love of finance and budgeting. She said, "I have a great team that supports each other and fosters a positive work environment. I also love working with students to teach them about financial literacy."

AOP became part of Geneal's life about two years ago. "I like being exposed to professional development opportunities and



Geneal Washam

networking," she said. She was happy to heed the call to serve as an officer of AOP and will assume the role of president in July.

"This will be my first opportunity to lead in this capacity," Geneal said. "I can say with confidence the professional development from AOP, other organizations, and mentors has prepared me for it."

Geneal also serves as in-service chairperson for AOP, arranging for speakers and in-service opportunities in this capacity.

Once Geneal receives her degree, she says, "I will continue to explore new opportunities at USM to enhance my skills and start a business."

When not at USM, Geneal enjoys supporting her children's extracurricular activities, couponing, self-care days, relaxing and binge-watching old tv shows with her two-year-old red nose pit, Nyla.



Geneal Washam with her children Alaysia (18), Joseph (24), and Alex (21).



A Better You

Self-improvement goes beyond the workplace in this year's programs.

by Dena Temple

It will be hard to beat the Fall 2023 lineup of AOP professional development programs!

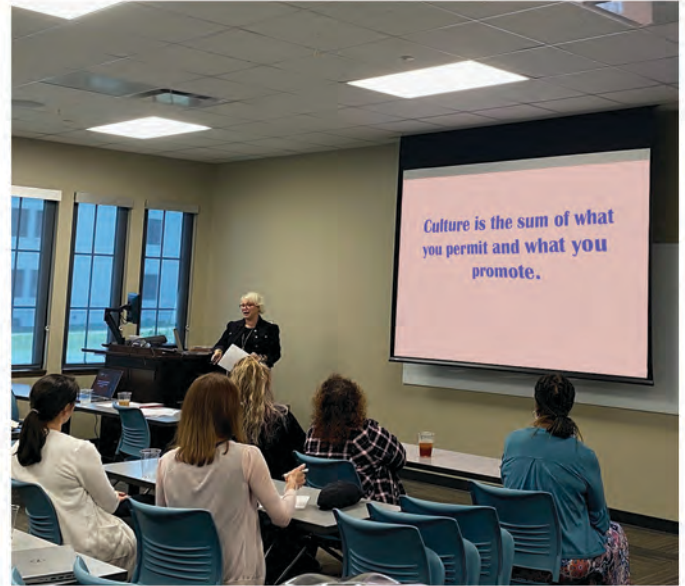
We started the fall semester with **"Building Trust in the Workplace,"** presented by Dr. Heather Annulis, Professor of Human Capital Development and Director of the School of Leadership. Based on the book *Trustology: The Art and Science of Leading High-trust Teams*, Dr. Annulis offered effective practices for building trust, a key component for success.

In October, we learned more about **artificial intelligence** thanks to Dr. Jennifer Lewis, Associate Director of Compliance and Ethics at USM. Dr. Lewis discussed the ethical concerns surrounding the use of AI

and demonstrated how AI could be used in different applications to streamline certain job functions.

Later in October, Kristen White presented **"Healthy Living for Your Brain and Body"** and shared research on diet and nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity, and social engagement with advice on healthy aging.

In November, AOP offered **"Principles of Leadership"** with Dr. Emily Holmes, director of Leadership and Student



Dr. Heather Annulis, Director of the School of Leadership (part of the College of Business and Economic Development), presents "Building Trust in the Workplace" on the Gulf Park campus in September.

Involvement. Her light-hearted presentation reviewed the five Principles of Leadership according to TV character Ted Lasso and offered advice for leaders who want to be their best.

We ended the fall semester with the **MAEOP Professional Development Seminar**, hosted by AOP on the Hattiesburg campus. Speakers covered topics such as retirement, AI, communication styles, and current trends and challenges.

Spring 2024 Schedule

March 7, 11:30 am - 1:00 pm

Women's Health Forum,

Gulf Park Campus, SB102

April 10, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

AOP General Meeting,

Teams (virtual)

June 6-7

MAEOP Annual Conference,

Hilton Garden Inn, Gulfport;

details to follow



Southern Miss AOP members at the recent MAEOP Conference on the Hattiesburg campus. Back row, l-r: Dena Temple, Mary Maner, Penny Isgar, Kelly Johnson, Jalynn Quibell, Dajaneir Thompson, Amon'Ta Coffee, Cynthia Crosby, Sheena Davis, and Alexis Cato. Front row, l-r: Joyce Powell, Jennifer Strength, Bia Shoemaker, Brittney Wakely, Cory Williams, and Cindy Walker.



Paying Back, Paying Forward

AOP's Community Service committee brought joy to those who needed it, and those who earned it. There's more to come this spring. by Dena Temple

Service to the community is one of AOP's fundamental objectives. This fall, we undertook projects to help the community on several fronts – and our members responded.

Critter Can Collection – AOP members collected pet food on the Hattiesburg campus for donations to North Star Rescue of Columbia, MS.

Homebaked for the Holidays – For the fourth year, USM AOP worked with the Wesley Foundation and Sigma Alpha Lambda, distributing 15 batches of homemade baked goods to USM's international students who could not go home over the holiday breaks.



Cans for Collegiates – AOP put out the call, and people responded. In November, we delivered several boxes of food to the Eagles Nest Food Pantry on the Hattiesburg campus. Thank you for helping to make this food drive a success!

Blessings in a Backpack – AOP, the Wesley Foundation, and Sigma

Alpha Lambda would like to thank everyone who donated cash and/or items for our Blessings in a Backpack initiative. We were able to help 16 of our international students who might otherwise have had to do without important school supplies.

Coats for Comfort – Another thank-you is due for the generous people who donated coats and other outerwear for our international students. Over 40 garments will be keeping them warm this winter! We collaborated with the Wesley Foundation and Sigma Alpha Lambda on this initiative as well.

Embracing Our Elderly – We all know that seniors in our area are in need. AOP recently provided some holiday cheer as well as necessities to seniors in a local nursing home. Thanks to the generosity of AOP members and the Southern Miss community, we raised over \$250 for holiday cheer and daily necessities.



Cards of Caring – We reach out each year to seniors and veterans in our community to let them know we care about them, especially during the holidays. A total of 580 holiday cards were delivered to area senior centers, including the Armed Forces Retirement Center in Biloxi.

Snacks for Support – The Forest General Cancer Center provides free snacks to patients undergoing chemotherapy, and AOP came through with \$380 worth of comfort food to help make their chemo days a little less stressful.

Spring Projects

We hope you will help one or more of our spring community service projects. Check your email for more details on the following initiatives:

- Adopt a Family
- Study packs for international students
- Canned food drives for food pantries and animal shelters

Awards Season

AOP supports our students, faculty, and staff by recognizing and rewarding their hard work.

by Dena Temple

Hard work is its own reward. We've all heard that one before, but AOP disagrees. Each year, we recognize a USM office professional and an educational administrator for service above and beyond the scope of their job descriptions.

For both awards listed below, candidates must have been employed at USM for at least three years.

Nomination forms should be submitted to the Affiliations Committee Chairman, Cindy Walker, at Box 5014, no later than May 1.

USM AOP Educational Office Professional of the Year

This annual award honors one

USM AOP member who excels in their duties to USM, participates in civic and community activities, and exemplifies the standards of professionalism and service of our organization. Nominees must be current AOP members and have held membership for at least two years. Their membership dues must be current.

The nomination form can be found [here](#). Additional guidelines can be found [here](#).

USM AOP Educational Administrator of the Year

This annual award honors one USM educational administrator whose service to USM achieves the highest standards of workplace

excellence geared toward student success.

Candidates must have been employed at USM for at least three years and are preferably known to most AOP members. Additional guidelines can be found [here](#).

To nominate an administrator for this award, complete the nomination form [here](#).

USM AOP Student Scholarship

USM AOP awards one \$500 scholarship to a student pursuing a degree in an educational office-related business program. Applicants may be a current USM student or a high-school student intending to further their education at USM. Guidelines for this scholarship can be found [here](#).

The application deadline for 2024 has passed. The Affiliations Committee is reviewing applications at this writing.

