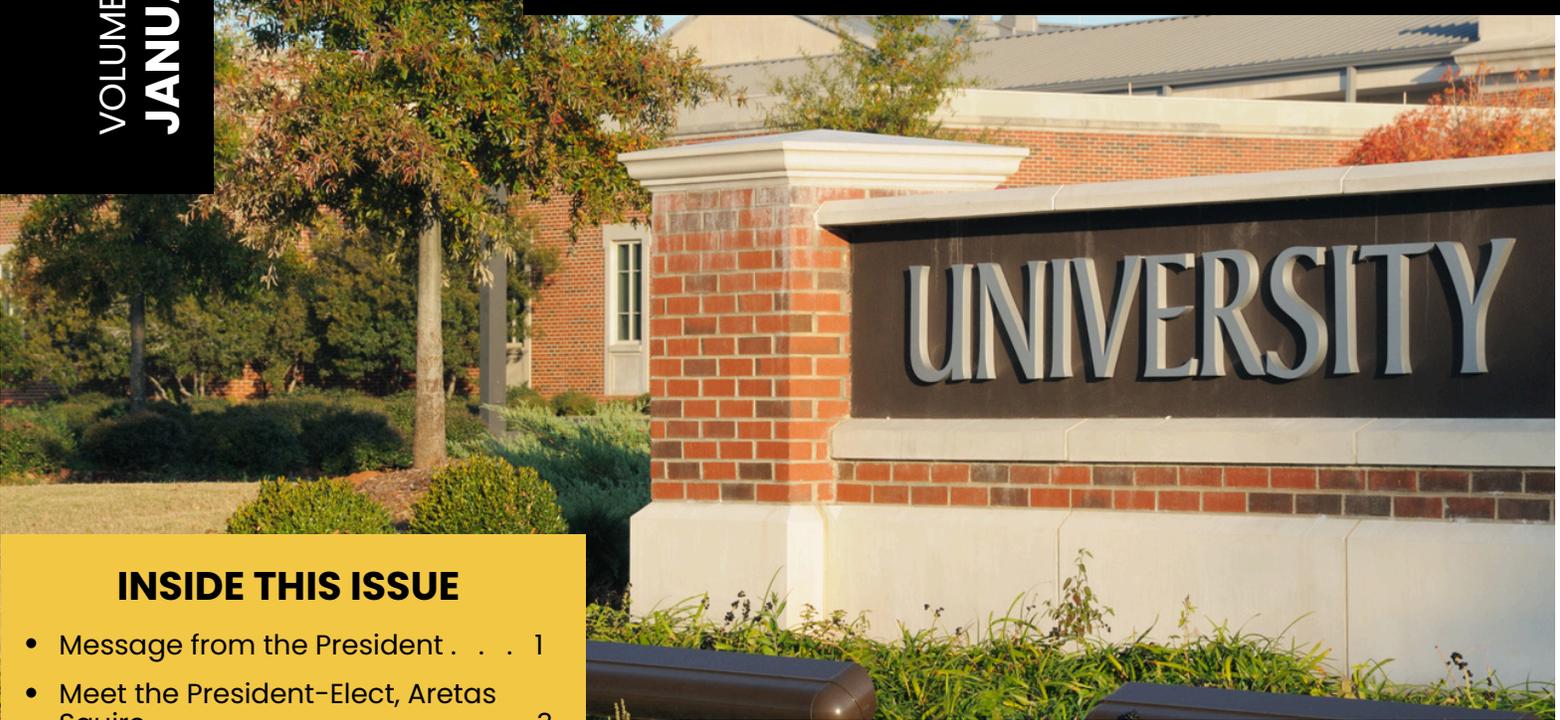




# THE VOICE



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### Meet the President-Elect, Aretas Squire

“When I joined AOP, the President was Geneal Washam, and the theme was ‘You Have a Village!’ The warm, inviting community of AOP catapults me to champion success,” writes Aretas.

*continued on page 3*



### Meet the Vice President, Mary Beth Simmons

Mary Beth Simmons, Vice President of AOP and chair of the Membership and Community Service committees, seeks to make a difference at USM and encourages others to jump in, too.

*continued on page 3*



*Gayle Sollfrank,  
President, USM Association  
of Office Professionals*

## Message from the President

Close your eyes for just a moment. Take a deep breath. The gift of today comes to us with potential. What does this look like?

Our theme this year invites us to embrace something simple and yet profound: **"Today is your day. Live inspired."** According to Merriam-Webster, the word inspired means

“outstanding or brilliant in a such way or to such a degree suggestive of divine influence." It also means "to draw in"—like drawing in breath itself. How beautiful is that? To live inspired is to breathe in excellence, purpose, gratitude, and growth with every moment we're given.

*continued on page 2*

**The Voice** is a 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.

## 2025-2026 Executive Board

### President

Gayle Sollfrank (Gayle.Sollfrank@usm.edu)

### President-Elect

Aretas Squire (Aretas.Coleman@usm.edu)

### Immediate Past-President

Geneal Washam  
(Geneal.Washam@usm.edu)

### Vice President

Mary Beth Simmons  
(Mary.E.Simmons@usm.edu)

### Secretary

Vonetta Jordan (Vonetta.Jordan@usm.edu)

### Treasurer

Cindy Walker, CEOE (Cynthia.Walker@usm.edu)

## Committee Chairpersons

### Affiliations:

Cindy Walker, CEOE

### Community Service:

Mary Beth Simmons

### Gulf Coast Committee:

Kelly McKenna

### Hospitality:

Vonetta Jordan

### In-Service:

Aretas Jordan

### Membership:

Mary Beth Simmons

### PSP Advisory:

Cory Williams, CEOE

### Publicity:

Open

### Ways and Means:

Kris Sullivan

AOP Website



## Message from the President, continued

And what a breath of fresh air we create together through AOP! Through our shared commitment to Community Service, Professional Development, and Relationship Building, we don't just talk about inspiration—we live it. We breathe life into it. Every act of service ripples outward, touching lives in ways we may never fully see.

Every opportunity for growth we embrace makes us stronger, wiser, and more capable of lifting others. Every moment of gratitude shifts our perspective from what's lacking to the abundance surrounding us. Every connection we build weaves a stronger fabric of support, encouragement, and possibility.

Author John O'Leary, in his powerful book *On Fire*, reminds us through his remarkable life story that our journey is what we choose to make of it. Despite facing unimaginable challenges after being burned on 100% of his body as a 9-year-old child, John chose inspiration over defeat. He chose to see each day as a gift. He chose to see his abilities rather than his limitations. He chose to live pursuing excellence, with purpose, with gratitude, and with growth in embracing his story so that he could encourage others along their journey.

We have that same choice every single day. Today is your day. You have the power to inspire and be inspired. To serve with joy. To grow with intention. To connect with authenticity. To breathe excellence into everything you touch.

As you move through your day, remember: You are part of something bigger. Your presence matters. Your contributions count. Your story is still being written, and the pen is in your hand. Take another deep breath. Grab hold of the inspiration. Go and share it with the world.

***"Today is your day. Live inspired." John O'Leary***



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## Meet the President-Elect, *continued*



*L to R: Geneal Washam, Immediate Past President and Aretas Squire, President-Elect at the May 16, 2025 AOP PDS Event.*

Encouraged by a friend to join AOP in 2024, Aretas was inspired by the networking and professional development opportunities AOP offered its members. She jumped right into committee activities, chairing the Ways & Means committee as well as becoming the Vice President of AOP and the Chair of the Membership committee. In June of 2025, she was voted in as the President-Elect of AOP.

On May 16, 2025, Aretas was part of a panel for the Professional Development Seminar event, joining Jewel Adams, then President of MAEOP; Ruby Allen, MAEOP; Geneal Washam, then President of AOP; Joyce Powell, Immediate Past-President of AOP; and Cindy Walker, Treasurer of AOP, to talk about AOP insights, benefits to members, and her personal journey with AOP. As President-Elect, Aretas focuses on In-Service opportunities, having connected talented speakers like Danyella Terrell, LCSW-S/LISCW and Tangee Carter, Assistant Director of Recreation Sel. and Training. Aretas ensures that each of the In-Service sessions plus any workshops that may be of interest for professional development are sent to Cory Williams, PSP Advisory committee chair, for the formal approval process to NAEOP for PSP hours prior to each event. Aretas individually sends certificates of attendance for all attendees of the In-Service events, helping with the overall advancement of the association and professional development of the members.

Aretas’ favorite event is the AOP Office Installation and Membership Appreciation luncheon held in June. During this event, members are celebrated for their accomplishments, and the outgoing and the newly elected Board members are formally recognized.

## Meet the Vice President, *continued*

A two-time graduate of Southern Miss and Hattiesburg native, Mary Beth returned to South Mississippi in the summer 2024 after seven years away teaching English at community colleges in Tennessee and North Carolina and working part-time in destination marketing.

As a new staff member, she was eager to form connections across campus. “I’ve never had a career that wasn’t teaching,” Mary Beth said, “so I wanted to find something that allowed me to interact with others and a way to stay plugged in to what the university had to offer.” Currently, Mary Beth works as a Grant Support Specialist within the College of Education and Human Sciences, assisting faculty in identifying and applying for extramural funding.

Within AOP, she appreciates the ability to aid others. “While at USM, I wanted service to be integral to my professional life. Being a part of our electric Community Service committee and seeing our projects come to life—from work with the YMCA, to local food pantries, nursing homes, and the Mississippi Coastal Cleanup Project—have been some of my favorite AOP experiences. On top of that, serving as VP for the organization has been a huge honor,” Mary Beth reflects.

*continued on page 4*



**Top:** *Mary Beth as a young USM fan*



**Below:** *Mary Beth and her husband, Kyle*

## Meet the Vice President, continued

Outside of AOP, Mary Beth is happily settled in Hattiesburg with her husband, Kyle (who proposed at Lake Byron), and their two black cats. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, and being outside. An avid traveler, she wishes she was on a plane to London at this very moment!

For Mary Beth Simmons, USM's Association of Office Professionals brings together the joy found in community and the challenges of leadership. She looks forward with enthusiasm to a future full of growth within AOP and at USM.

WHEMN Conference 2026



UNMASK YOUR POTENTIAL

MARCH 5-6, 2026 · HATTIESBURG, MS  
HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

For more information or to register, visit <https://whemn.org/events/#upcoming>



## Why Join AOP?

### *What Membership Affords Me*

by Mary Beth Simmons

As a new staff member at USM in the Fall of 2024, I was eager to make connections and build my resume. But how? After a quick search on USM's website, I found my answer: The Association of Office Professionals. AOP immediately became an important part of my Southern Miss story.

The benefits it affords members are numerous. There are professional development opportunities such as speaker series and in-service meetings, chances to volunteer with both community-wide and AOP-led programs, ways to advocate for oneself as an employee, and the ability to earn pay increases through the Professional Service Program (PSP).

Growth and leadership opportunities such as these abound, but what many members say makes AOP special is the community. Through AOP, colleagues who were formerly strangers across campus are now counted as friends, the acquaintances in your committee meetings become your go-to contact for questions, and you have the support to become who you want to be. USM's AOP has staying power because of what it can do for its members, but more so, it continues to be worthwhile because of its members. This year and into the future, I encourage you to lean in, stay involved, and reap the rewards of our organization. And if you haven't yet joined, there's no time like the present! You can get started here.

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## Ways & Means Committee

by Kris Sullivan



*Kris Sullivan, Ways & Means Committee Chair*

What is Ways & Means? The Ways and Means committee is responsible for planning, implementing, and overseeing fundraising projects for the Association of Office Professionals. Our goal is to create meaningful opportunities that generate financial support for AOP's initiatives while fostering teamwork and engagement among members.

The funds raised by the Ways & Means committee directly support AOP's programs in professional development, community service, and member engagement. Each fundraiser helps ensure that AOP can continue offering enriching experiences, service opportunities, and recognition programs for its members throughout the year. Since Kris has been chair (July 1, 2025), the highlights from this semester include the following:

The committee hosted two successful fundraisers:

**McAlister's Fundraiser.** This was a fun and well-supported event

with great participation held on October 27th. The final donation amount came in at \$356.80.

**Poppin' Popcorn Sale:** This delicious fundraiser went from October 6<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>, and earned approximately \$156 in total profit, which will go toward supporting upcoming AOP programs and professional development opportunities.

**50/50 Raffle:** This exciting cash win opportunity ran throughout the month of December, and the ticket drawing was live streamed on AOP's Facebook page. Congratulations to Cory Williams, CEOE, on her \$120.00 win!

Behind the scenes, the Ways & Means committee chair and members are building partnerships with local businesses and maintaining clear communication

throughout the planning process to ensure success.

Having enthusiastic committee members who are proactive about outreach made each event run smoothly and effectively. Have you thought about how you could get involved? We are always looking for creative, motivated members to help plan and promote future fundraisers! If you enjoy event planning, marketing, or community outreach, we'd love to have you join us. Members can also propose fundraiser ideas or volunteer to assist during events. As a closing thank you, the Ways & Means committee would like to give a big shoutout to Kim Evans, former Publicity committee chair, who was always a listening ear on ideas and was amazing at promoting and marketing the events!

**T-SHIRT SALE**

S - XL

SHORT SLEEVE - \$15

LONG SLEEVE - \$20

SWEATSHIRTS - \$25

2XL & UP

SHORT SLEEVE - \$20

LONG SLEEVE - \$25

SWEATSHIRTS - \$30

For inquiries and purchases, [kristopher.sullivan@usm.edu](mailto:kristopher.sullivan@usm.edu)

Showcase your AOP C.P.R. spirit with this new shirt design! Choose from black or gold, and your favorite style:

- o Short-sleeve shirts
- o Long-sleeve shirts
- o Sweatshirts

For more pictures, sizes, and styles, visit the "Order Here" link. Place your order before January 31st! One winner will be drawn from all purchases to receive a free AOP sweatshirt or long-sleeve shirt of their choice!

[Order Here](#)

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## Member Spotlight: Rami Parker

sent in by Kelly McKenna, Gulf Park Committee Chair

Welcome to our AOP Member Spotlight, the first of 2026! Rami Parker was nominated by Kelly McKenna, who is the Gulf Park committee chair and works in the Gulf Coast Library.

Rami Parker joined the Gulf Park Testing Center as the New Proctoring Coordinator in July 2025, and has taken the position to new heights with her savvy personality and ability to bring high level updates and organization to the department. With a focus on how to best serve our students, the research and development she is overseeing ensures policies are up to date and the center runs more efficiently, adding important changes that will make a difference for years to come.

Rami has been nominated for this recognition because of her radiant spirit and her ability to help others no matter what she is asked. As a new USM employee, Rami has proven that she is a trusted leader, an advocate for students in the testing center, and an invaluable member of the Gulf Coast Library staff. She brings so much positivity to the workplace, and she shares the AOP spirit of connections, friendship and vision to create a workplace better than the one in which she started.

As a designer at heart, the first thing that wowed us was Rami's amazing decorating talent! She made a drab, boring office come to life with a few pieces of artwork, some pretty lampshades and desk accessories. Everyone wanted to visit her because of the warm, inviting environment she created. She lives in Bay St. Louis, is also a wonderful mom, and one of her children lives in Japan! She makes the best Mac & Cheese (New Orleans style), loves Diet Coke and is a delight to work with. She used to be a teacher and Makeup Artist!



Rami Parker, University Libraries / Gulf Park Testing Center at the USM Gulf Park Campus

Is there someone you would like to nominate for the Member Spotlight?

Email [AOPConnect@usm.edu](mailto:AOPConnect@usm.edu) and find out how!



### TIPS FOR FILE Organization

- ☑ If it works, don't worry about how it looks.
- ☑ Organize your files around retrieval.
- ☑ Assign toss-out dates to your files.
- ☑ Move your paper—don't let it pile up.
- ☑ Clear your desk before you leave for the day.

Download your own copy of The Office Organizer!

Business Management Daily. (n.d.). The Office Organizer: 10 tips on file organizing, clutter control, document management, business shredding policy, record retention guidelines and how to organize office emails. <https://training.businessmanagementdaily.com/3027/the-office-organizer-10-tips/>

Your Office Pro Tip



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# Spring 2026 Professional Development Opportunities



## Excel Opportunity with Chris Lowe

The Center for Faculty Development, in tandem with the Office of Institutional Research, is sponsoring a workshop series on **Excel**. This limited series is open to Staff Council and AOP Members who are interested in expanding their skill level in **Excel**. There are 6 sessions or levels offered in this series, and you may choose to attend all 6 or cherry-pick the sessions that are of most interest to you. You will need to bring your laptop to each session, as these workshops are designed to be hands-on and interactive.

[Click here for more info.](#)



## Coursera Career Academy



USM now recognizes Coursera's Career Academy courses as applicable toward Educational Enhancement through the PSP process as outlined by NAEOP. This opens access to professional development courses from industry leaders including IBM, Intuit, Microsoft, and Adobe—all available through Coursera's Career Academy. Start your individualized professional journey by signing up for Coursera!

[Inquire for info here.](#)



**HAVE YOU CONSIDERED...**  
*running for AOP Office?*

Elections for the 2026-2027 AOP Board happen in May.

Being part of the AOP Board develops your leadership skills, gives room for your creative side, invests in yourself and others, builds your PSP hours, grows your network, and provides mentorship opportunities for fellow staff.



## Fall 2025 Highlights



### USM Homecoming Parade, October 25

L to R: Aretas Squire, Melissa Carpenter, Kim Evans, Tamara Miller, Gayle Sollfrank



### MAEOP PDS at USM, October 17

L to R: Cindy Walker, CEOE, David Tolbert, Southern Tire Mart, Faye Cornelius, President, MAEOP



### Mississippi Coastal Cleanup, October 20

L to R: Mary Beth Simmons, Gayle Sollfrank, Aretas Squire, Kim Evans



### Cocktails & Conversations, December 5

L to R: Crystal Tolible, Barbara Dawson, Darlene Shepherd, Diane Williford



### General Body Meeting and Christmas Celebration at Gulf Coast Library, December 18

Thank you to Kelly McKenna and the Gulf Coast Committee for planning this!



## Board and General Body Meetings: January through June, 2026

**January 15** - Board Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

**January 22** - General Body Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

In-Service Session: *Stress Management*  
with Melanie Blanton

**February 12** - Board Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

**March 12** - Board Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

**March 19** - General Body Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

In-Service Session: *Managing Up and  
Navigating Your Higher Education  
Careers* with Dr. SheRhonda Gibbs

**April 9** - Board Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

**April 16** - General Body Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

In-Service Session: *Higher Education  
Graduate Programs* with Dr. Holly Foster

**May 14** - Board Meeting

11:30-12:30 - IC 319 & Teams

**May 21** - General Body Meeting

11:30-12:30 - Teams

In-Service Session: TBD

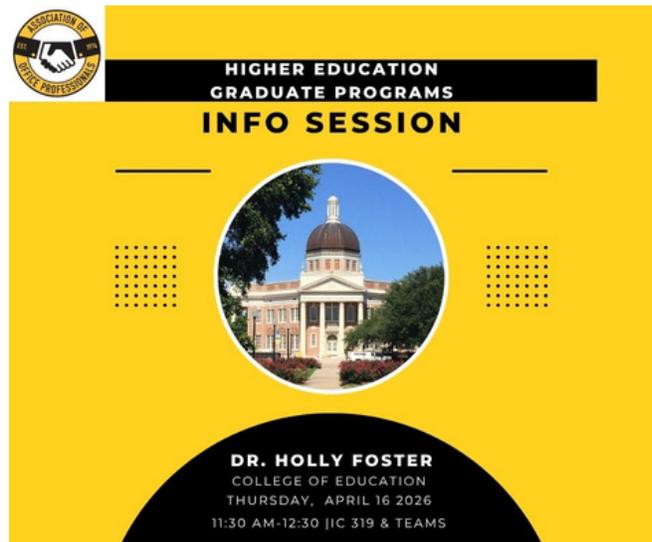
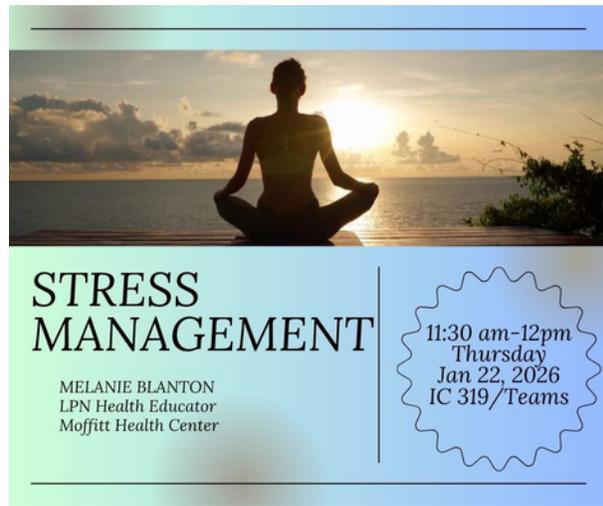
**June 18** - AOP Officer Installation and

Awards Ceremony - Time and Location

TBD

*Any USM staff person interested in AOP is  
welcome to attend a General Body  
Meeting.*

*Elections for the Executive Board and  
Committee Chair positions takes place in  
May and are made official in June. If you  
are interested in running or if you would  
like to serve on the Election Committee,  
reach out to [AOPConnect@usm.edu](mailto:AOPConnect@usm.edu)*



Each of the In-Service sessions are pre-approved through the PSP Advisory committee chair for Professional Standards Program Hours. Attendees received a Certificate of Attendance from the In-Service committee chair, to keep for their records toward their PSP Certificate goals.

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