



<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop/>

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Last fall the MWACOP requested MWA office support personnel to submit artwork for a new MWACOP logo to replace the former PASTG logo that is used on the web site, news notes, non-monetary awards, and other applications. We received several wonderful submissions. The MWACOP reviewed all the artwork and we are happy to announce that the artwork submitted by Jessica Jordan-Walker as shown above on this edition of News Notes was unanimously chosen to represent the MWACOP. Congratulations Jessica and a huge thank you to all of you who took the time to make a submission.

The MWACOP and several volunteers from MWA have recently reviewed the SOP for needed revisions. We will soon be uploading new and/or revised documents to the A-Z listing of the SOP. We will also be removing the chapters and using only the A-Z listing. We hope to have this task completed by June. As there are many items on the SOP and most change on a frequent basis, if anyone sees an error or something that needs to be updated, we would be grateful if you would send a quick email to a MWACOP member so that we can get it fixed or added to the SOP as soon as possible.

Applications were solicited in April 2012 for vacancies left by Brittney Jones and Missy Stiefel. Brittney was the Technical Advisor on the MWACOP and served as the NACOP representative. She left ARS employment on April 6, 2012 and Missy Stiefel now serves as the Technical Advisor/NACOP representative to complete Brittney's term. In June, Kim Meyers will rotate to the Ex-Officio position on the MWACOP per the rotation schedule approved in the charter. Several applications were received and reviewed by the Council. We are happy to announce that Robin Brewster and Lori Burma are the two new members of the MWACOP, effective June 2012.

Kim Meyers & Heather Lewandowski
Co-Chairs

THE FINER POINTS OF OSQR

By Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

In 1999, ARS created the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) in response to the 1998 Farm Bill requiring USDA to establish procedures to perform scientific peer reviews of all research projects. These peer reviews are intended to ensure the ARS' research has scientific merit and that at least once every five years a majority of the reviewers are external scientists. This peer review process is an opportunity for researchers to receive feedback on ways to improve the quality of the research that's being conducted. Suggestions by those outside of ARS can lead to novel ideas that may not have been considered by ARS scientists. The development of a five-year research plan does not occur overnight. This process takes a number of months and many people are involved in creating a sound research project. When the time comes to create a new project, the scientist(s) assigned to the project originates a concept paper, works with the Office of National Programs (ONP) to create a Program Direction and Resource Allocation Memorandum (PDRAM), which includes the new project's title, relevance to the action plan, objectives of the research, source of funds and funding information, and, finally, the National Program information. The project team, through the leadership of the Lead Scientist, has 12-14 weeks to write the new 60-month project. Prior to writing the project, the Midwest Area provides training to the team members, including the

Program Support Assistants and Secretaries, to ensure that the documents are well-prepared regarding scientific content and visual presentation for review by the panel.

Once the project has been written, the Lead Scientist submits the plan to three *ad hoc* reviewers who provide input as to the feasibility of the proposed research. The plan and the three reviews are then submitted to the Area after the Lead Scientist has made sufficient changes to address comments made by the reviewers. Area has five weeks to review the document and provide comments back to the scientist. The scientist will make the necessary changes and return the document to the Area for final review. The Area will then submit the plan to ONP. ONP will review and return the plan to the Area and, if necessary, will return the plan to the scientist to address ONP's concerns. If there are no changes needed, the plan is then forwarded to the OSQR to be reviewed by the panel of individuals who have been selected based on expertise and experience in the scientific field pertaining to the research project in question.

After the project has been reviewed, the panel results will include a score and questions. Five outcomes are possible, but due to limited space in this forum, suppose the outcome is scored as "Minor Revision Required." This means that the project plan is feasible as written but needs some minor changes to "increase quality to a higher level." The Lead Scientist will address the comments and make the necessary revisions. The Area will then send the plan to OSQR to certify the plan. If on the other hand, a major revision is necessary or if the project is not feasible, the plan will go back to the panel for review. After the plan has been certified, a 416/417 will be created in ARIS.

UPCOMING DATES FOR ARIS

By Janeen Polen, Wooster, OH

ARMPS Submission

April through the end of July is annual budget time and throughout the Midwest area, decisions are being made and what-ifs are being considered. This time of year we spend hours loading ARMPS, and fussing over Microsoft Excel Spreadsheets. Reviews have already begun and all final updates to ARMPS must be made by August 20th.

Research Associate Program – Class of 2013

The call for proposals for Headquarters-funded ARS Research Associates (or Post-Doc program) was sent on May 8, 2012. Proposals are to be electronically submitted in ARIS June 1 – July 1, 2012.

LOIs and ARIS Actions

July 23, 2012 is the deadline for LOIs for outgoing agreements (SCAs, Grants, Assistance-Type Cooperative Agreements, Non-Funded Cooperative Agreements, and Memorandum of Understandings). August 3, 2012 is the deadline for ARIS/AIMS actions to the Area level. For additional information refer to the email Lori Wilson-Voss sent on May 9, 2012 or visit the MWACOP website.

<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop/sop/index.html>

APPRAISALS

By Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

Most parents tell their children not to brag about their achievements—it is looked upon as being conceited and not so humble. However, when documenting your accomplishments for your annual performance appraisal, bragging is *strongly* encouraged! If *you* don't tell your story, who will? However, waiting until the last minute to begin "your story" is not advisable. At the beginning of the cycle, create a document just for this purpose and update it throughout the year with your notable successes. Or you could even note it on your calendar so that you can refer back to it when assembling your document.

In order to document your scientists' manuscripts for the rating cycle, a Detail by Author report for "J" type publications should be run from ARIS using the date range of 10/1/11-9/30/12 in the "DATE SUB TO JOURNAL" field, not the Approval Date field. The entry count from this search ties directly to element for which the specific goal is to submit two peer-reviewed manuscripts for the rating cycle.

Here's a few more (but not all-inclusive requirements) tips when preparing performance standards for the next cycle:

- ✓ Plans should contain a minimum of three but not more than seven critical elements and must contain one *non-critical* element.
- ✓ Plans for non-supervisory employees must include *in a critical element* the responsibility for demonstrating a commitment to EEO/CR.
- ✓ When an employee is officially designated as a supervisor, his/her plan must:

- Have a separate critical element for Supervision or Leadership/Management
 - Employee and customer/stakeholder perspectives
 - Have a separate critical element that addresses EEO/CR
- ✓ The plan must be signed by the supervisor, reviewing official, and the employee.

For more detailed information concerning performance appraisals, please visit the AFM web site: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/performance/index.htm>

ANNUAL REPORTS

By Debi Schaefer, Madison, WI

Annual reports are due to the Area Office by August 10, 2012. Lori Wilson-Voss sent detailed instructions on annual reports in her email of 5/15/2012 (Guidance for Research Annual Reports (AD-421) for FY 2012-Due to Area 8-10-12). In her email she stated: Dr. Chandler wants to see an accomplishment for every D project again this year. When writing your accomplishments consider the following advice from the perspective of ONP, from Dr. Daniel Strickman, “the best ones are self contained, written for an audience with a general science education, begin with a sentence stating the problem, and end with a sentence stating the impact. It is okay to blend together various projects to make a good accomplishment.” She also plans to hold a training session for Program Support Assistants and Secretaries on the program changes the last part of May or first part of June.

Additional information on annual reports can be found at this link:

<http://www.npstaff.ars.usda.gov/ARIS/Manual/>.

The ARIS on-line manual is an excellent source of information when entering annual reports.

CORRESPONDENCE: Reminder on using the correct format

By Debi Schaefer, Madison, WI

It’s always a good idea to continually refresh our memories on practices/formats we are required to use in performing our job. Correspondence is one of those we tend to forget and don’t always follow the proper guidelines. This is just a quick note to remind us.

In June 2008, Cathy Lonaberger, Executive Assistant to Dr. Knipling, sent us the following reminder via email:

“The Administrator’s Office receives numerous information copies of correspondence prepared by ARS employees. In recent weeks, it has been noted that the preparers of some of this correspondence are not following ARS and Department correspondence procedures. For example, in addition to grammatical and spelling errors (including Agricultural Research Service), there has been frequent misuse of postal abbreviations for States, incorrect use of memos (internal only) and letters (external only), and other format/style problems.

The ARS Correspondence Manual sets standards of format, appearance, and style. It is available as a P&P on the ARS web site. These established guidelines should be followed by all employees who prepare correspondence, both program and office professionals. It is important that ARS maintain a professional image in both internal and external communications.

Please distribute this communication to your field locations. All of us that serve in roles of office professionals are available to provide additional guidance and assistance on correspondence style procedures when needed.”

For questions regarding the correct format to use, please consult the MWACOP SOP Manual for examples (<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop/>). This link will also give you access to the ARS Correspondence Manual.

THE VALUE OF MENTORING – AN INVESTMENT IN YOURSELF AND USDA

By Debi Schaefer, Madison, WI

The idea of a mentor dates back to Greek mythology and Homer’s poem “Odyssey.” “Mentor” was a friend of the legendary Greek king, Odysseus. Odysseus trusted Mentor to be in charge of his son, Telemachus, and his palace while he fought the Trojan War. Moving forward in time, the book “Les Aventures de Telemaque” by the French writer, François Fénelon, was published anonymously in 1689 (reissued by his family in

1717). The lead character is Mentor, accompanying Telemachus on his travels. The book was a very popular publication that was considered to be a satire on the reign of Louis XIV of France. It was so popular that it was translated into almost every language of the time, published as many editions and even translated in Latin verse. In modern times, Webster's Dictionary defines "mentor" as: 1. dating back to 1616; 2. originating in Latin, from Greek; 3. *capitalized*: a friend of Odysseus entrusted with the education of Odysseus' son, Telemachus; 4. **a**: a trusted counselor or guide **b**: tutor, coach. An idea that has lasted this long is surely valuable and quite an awesome responsibility. From personal experience, I can say that it is both. Additionally, it is also very rewarding.

When I was asked if I would mentor a new program assistant, my first thought was, "Me???, I can't do that! I'm not sure I can successfully do this; I don't have time, etc." I did, however, realize that this is a valuable service to a new USDA secretary and I decided that despite my reservations I would assist this new individual. From working on a university campus, I understood the value of mentoring as I observed the professor/graduate student relationship. I was also fortunate enough to have a supervisor most recently that guided me in my own professional development and helped me gain additional expertise, knowledge and confidence to perform my duties. Given this background, I knew this would be an invaluable service to a new employee. My experiences in this new endeavor were valuable to me and I hope to my mentee as well. I think perhaps we take for granted all the knowledge we gain as secretarial staff in our organization and forget that we've been able to acquire this over a long period of time, with each year adding additional knowledge and confidence. We forget that this can be very overwhelming to new employees. I discovered that I not only had time to assist a new employee (while still getting my own work completed, yes it took a little bit more time, but not too much), but that I also benefitted from seeing my acquired knowledge from a new perspective. It was my hope that the person I was mentoring would be able to do the same for a new employee. In addition to all this, I gained a new valuable professional contact that I know I can rely on. The personal interaction with this new Program Assistant was also an added

benefit as my mentee had a wonderful sense of humor and I enjoyed that part of my day.

I would encourage all of the secretaries in the Midwest Area to really consider being a mentor. It really is a valuable contribution and one that will give back to you in return. We've all heard "it's more blessed to give than to receive", but my mentoring experience has been that by giving I was the recipient! Even though my mentee is no longer with USDA, I'm hopeful that they know what a valuable and rewarding opportunity they gave me to serve as their mentor.

NEW FACES



Robin Brewster (Marshfield, WI) is the new Secretary at the Environmentally Integrated Dairy Management Research Unit. Robin is an Ohio native. Before she came to USDA she worked for the Department of Defense in Minneapolis, MN. She is retired from the US Air Force with 23 years of service. Robin and her husband Scott, have one child: Ryan (17). Robin enjoys shopping, running, being outdoors in the summertime and spending time with her family.



Dorene Hensler (Madison, WI) became the Secretary (OA) for the Dairy Forage and Aquaculture Research Unit at the U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center in May 2011. Dorene has been employed at DFRC since May 2006, previously as the Office Automation Assistant. Prior to her employment at DFRC, Dorene was the Office Manager for a wholesale beef processing plant.



Jessica Jordan Walker (Ames, IA). Jessica is originally from Knoxville, Iowa and grew up on a farm that is over 100 years old and kept within the family (Century Farm). She is the youngest of four children and went to college at Iowa State University (ISU). While at college she joined the Army Reserves and did basic training in 1998 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. In 1999 she completed AIT training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Jessica graduated in 2002 from ISU with a Bachelor's in Science. The summer of 2002 and 2003 she participated in a couple of joint training sessions with the South Korean Army at Camp Walker, South Korea. December of 2003 she was called to active duty and served for 15 months in Camp Anaconda, Iraq. Jessica first joined the civilian service while in the military in Iowa City, Iowa in 2003 and worked for an Army Reserve center only a couple months prior to getting deployed. Upon her return she took a job at Fort Sill Oklahoma in 2005 as an Office Automation Assistant with the Student Personnel Processing Center on base. She received a promotion to work with the Department of Logistics in 2006. Moving to Nashville, Tennessee she took a job with Defense Contract Audit Agency in 2007. It was in Nashville where she had two children, son Brett, now 4 years old and daughter Jordan now almost 2 years old. In 2011 she took a job with USDA to bring her back home to Iowa. After being away from her family

and then having one of her own, she found out how important it is to be close to family.



Lila Walters (Madison, WI) is the new Secretary to the Center Director at the Dairy Forage Research Center. Prior to becoming a Federal employee, Lila worked as an Executive Assistant and Office Manager in the private sector. Lila's only deviation from working in an office setting was a five year stint with Midwest Express Airlines. Lila was born in Little Rock, Arkansas; she graduated from high school in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, where she continued her education at the Wisconsin Indianhead Technical Institute, graduating with an Associate's Degree in Secretarial Science. Lila and her husband, Jim, share their country home with their twelve year old Boxer, Sophie.

RETIREMENTS:

Marsha Ebener
Sandy Groneberg
Shirley Murphy
Judy Shoen

DEPARTURES:

Ann Houser
Brittney Jones