



# THE VOICE

USM ASSOCIATION OF OFFICE PROFESSIONALS

2024, Volume 2 Fall 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.

## 2024-2025 Board Members

### President

Geneal Washam (geneal.washam@usm.edu)

### President-Elect

Gayle Sollfrank (gayle.sollfrank@usm.edu)

### Vice-President

Aretas Squire (aretas.coleman@usm.edu)

### Secretary

Cory Williams, CEOE (cory.smith@usm.edu)

### Treasurer

Cindy Walker, CEOE (cynthia.walker@usm.edu)

### Immediate Past President

Joyce Powell, CEOE (joyce.powell@usm.edu)

## Committee Chairpersons

### Affiliations:

Cindy Walker, CEOE

### Budget:

Cindy Walker, CEOE

### Community Service:

Crystal Tolible

### Gulf Coast Committee:

Dajaneir Thompson

### Hospitality:

Cory Williams, CEOE

### In-Service:

Gayle Sollfrank

### Membership:

Aretas Squire

### PSP Advisory:

Cory Williams, CEOE

### Publicity:

Dena Temple

### Staff Council Liaison:

Maurine Pace

### Ways and Means:

Aretas Squire

## Newsletter

Dena Temple, Editor (dena.temple@usm.edu)

## Contact AOP

Aretas Squire (601) 266-5563

## Visit us on the web!

[usm.edu/association-office-professionals](http://usm.edu/association-office-professionals)

# Message From the President

*Geneal Washam, President  
USM Association of Office Professionals*

Happy Fall! It's a beautiful time of year, full of change and new beginnings.

As we continue to navigate this semester, let us remember our goals are not just about achieving milestones but also about supporting each other and creating a positive environment.

This year, I chose the theme "You Have A Village." Whether it's sharing ideas during meetings or lending a hand when someone is overwhelmed, we are here for you.

I encourage everyone to stay engaged and take advantage of

the resources available to us. Together, we can make this semester not only productive but also enjoyable. A heartfelt thank-you to everyone who has committed to AOP. Each of you plays a vital role in our mission.

Let's keep the momentum going. I look forward to seeing all the amazing things we'll accomplish together.

AOPTTT!



JOIN US ON  
MONDAY, OCT. 28  
5:00 - 9:00 PM

**McALISTER'S DELI**

McALISTER'S DELI  
2300 HARDY STREET  
HATTIESBURG

20% OF ALL SALES  
WILL BENEFIT AOP!

AOP will hold their first fundraiser of the season at McAlister's Deli in Hattiesburg on Monday, October 28. The fundraiser was organized by the AOP Ways and Means Committee. The restaurant will donate 20% of all dine-in and carry-out sales to AOP! If you live in the area, come out and support our good work.

Follow us on Facebook



and Instagram





# NAEOP, MAEOP Conferences Bring Members Together

A “hometown” conference in Gulfport and a national conference in Little Rock offer camaraderie, learning

by Dena Temple

Six current members of USM AOP attended the 75th annual Mississippi Association of Educational Office Professionals (MAEOP) Conference in Gulfport in June. Drawing attendees from across the state, the event focused on professional development and networking opportunities for educational office staff.

This year's conference featured an opening session on building emotional intelligence and workshops on substance abuse disorder, preventing identity theft, and changing “What ifs” to “Why Nots” to expand one’s comfort zone. Attendees praised the event’s relevance to their work and their day-to-day lives.

Among the USM AOP participants at the MAEOP Conference were new president Geneal Washam, past president Dr. Joyce Powell, treasurer

Cindy Walker, and secretary Cory Williams.

“Attending the MAEOP conference allowed me to develop new competencies relevant to my field,” said Geneal Washam. “Each workshop was informative and focused on skill-building tools that will help advance my career. Overall, working with the organization on a state level is a valuable investment in your career and personal growth.”

“The MAEOP conference provided a great opportunity to connect with higher education professionals from across the state,” said Cory Williams, “and have some wonderful conversations about what is going on in our universities and how we can help each other.”

USM AOP members moved into several MAEOP leadership positions at the conference:

- **Cindy Walker** assumed the role of vice-president.

- **Cory Williams** was named treasurer.

- **Dr. Joyce Powell** will serve as membership director.

The conference left participants energized and equipped with new skills to enhance their roles in Mississippi's educational institutions. Information about next year's conference will be available soon.

## NAEOP Conference Brings Educational Office Professionals to Little Rock

In July, the National Association of Educational Office Professionals held its annual conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, drawing attendees from across the country. As always, the conference provided the opportunity to “LEARN,” according to their promotional material: Leadership, Education, Achievement, Recognition, and Networking.

Workshops and seminars covered a wide range of topics, including learning to adapt, work/life balance, mindfulness, office safety, cybersecurity, memory skills, humor in the workplace, and learning to lead.

USM AOP was well represented at the national conference, and members found it to be both informative and inspiring.

Cory Williams, USM AOP's 2024-2025 secretary and PSP chair, said she always learns something at NAEOP. “My takeaways from this year's conference: one, you don't have to know everything; and two, there is no job worth your health or mental state.”

Past president Dr. Joyce Powell, who also traveled to Little Rock in July, shared, “Attending the NAEOP

conference allowed me to foster connections with professionals from educational institutions nationwide. These relationships have led to collaborative efforts that enhance my personal growth and growth in our local AOP organization.”

The conference also provided ample networking opportunities, allowing participants to share ideas and experiences with colleagues from different states and educational settings.

A highlight of the event was the keynote. Lisa Olsen, MS, CWCA, engaged attendees with her program, “Are You All In?” She encourages administrative professionals to expand their potential and “relationship engineer” for career success.

USM AOP was recognized at the conference with awards for First Place, Website Award (under 75 members), and our newsletter, *The Voice*, earned the Rachel Maynard Award for Excellence in Communication. Congratulations to past president Joyce Powell and newsletter editor / publicity chair Dena Temple for their hard work!

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, events like the NAEOP conference play a vital role in ensuring that office professionals remain at the forefront of best practices and innovations in their field. The insights and connections made in Little Rock are sure to have a lasting impact on educational institutions across the country, including here at Southern Miss.



### TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Message	1
McAlister's Fundraiser	1
Conference Recaps	2-3
Committee Reports	4-5
Fuzzy's Fundraiser	5
Upcoming Events	5
Spotlight: Aretas Squire	6
Spotlight: Gayle Sollfrank	7



**MAEOP Highlights:** Above left, USM AOP president Geneal Washam poses with MAEOP keynote speaker Dr. Delores McNair after her presentation. Right, USM's Dr. Bradley Winton presented a program on emotional intelligence at the MAEOP conference.



**Scenes from the NAEOP Conference:** Above left, USM AOP board members (l-r) Cory Williams, Dr. Joyce Powell, Cindy Walker, and Geneal Washam pose with USM AOP's First Place, Website Award and the Rachel Maynard Award for Excellence in Communication for our newsletter, *The Voice*. Right, the four USM AOP members are ready for the awards banquet.





## AOP Committees Hard at Work

To volunteer for any committee, contact the committee chair.  
Help make AOP better and stronger!

### Affiliations



Chair:  
Cindy Walker  
Members: Cory Williams, Melissa Carpenter

We have affiliated with MAEOP and NAEOP for 2024-25.

One function of the Affiliations Committee is to oversee our annual awards and scholarships program. Nominations are solicited in the fall and spring, and awards are announced at the annual Membership Recognition Luncheon at the end of the spring semester.

Applications for the USM-AOP Educational Office Professional of the Year, Educational Administrator of the Year, and the Student Scholarship are all available on the Committees page of the AOP website.

### Community Service



Chair:  
Crystal Tolible  
Members: Gayle Sollfrank, Melissa Carpenter, Dr. Joyce Powell, Dr. Mary Maner

This committee serves to coordinate, promote and facilitate community outreach and volunteer efforts within and outside of the University of Southern Mississippi. The Committee met

on Oct. 16 and discussed the Coats for Comfort drive to be held Nov. 4-8, a food drive for the Eagle's Nest Pantry on Nov. 20 with the USM Staff Council, and food donations for the House of Blessing (M, W, F, (601) 310-8072). Other community events are in progress. Coastal staff members are encouraged to donate to food drives on that campus.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 30 at 2:00 pm.

### Gulf Coast



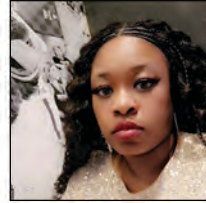
Chair:  
Dajaneir Thompson  
Members:  
Dr. Joyce Powell, Dr. Mary Maner, Kelly McKenna, Penny Isgar

The committee met on October 2 and discussed the following action items:

Stennis Visit – The committee will start planning for Spring 2025.

AOP Snack and Share! Friday, Nov. 8, 1:30 pm – This event will be a chance for staff to get to know each other. Bring a fall snack and introduce yourself. Which department do you work in? How can you be a resource? Details to come.

### Membership



Chair:  
Aretas Squire  
Members:  
Latasha Peters

As of October 2024, we have three new members: Dorothy Thompson, Maurine Pace, and Anissia Smith. Membership email outreach is being sent weekly to USM faculty and staff. The committee's goal is five new members a month.

Upcoming: Membership drive (AOP Interest Day); new membership swag; new marketing materials; delivering donuts to USM departments with membership flyers.

Membership renewal dues by Oct 31, 2024.

### Publicity



Chair:  
Dena Temple  
Members:  
Alexis Cato, Dr. Joyce Powell, Mary Simmons

The Publicity Committee met on Oct. 4. We welcomed Joyce Powell and Mary Simmons to the committee and welcomed back Alexis Cato, who managed AOP's social media presence last year.

Joyce Powell volunteered to maintain the AOP website, which

is greatly appreciated. Alexis Cato, who did a great job keeping AOP's social media accounts updated, agreed to continue for 2024-2025. Dena Temple is working on a fall newsletter, which will be distributed in late October. Joyce offered to assist in providing content. Mary Simmons offered to write any news releases for AOP.

Any comments concerning AOP's publicity can be sent to dena.temple@usm.edu. The next meeting will be held on Friday, November 1 at 2:00 pm.

### Ways and Means



Chair:  
Aretas Squire  
Members:  
Tamara Miller

Current Fundraiser: Monday, November 25, Fuzzy's Taco Shop, Hattiesburg, 5-9 pm.

Upcoming fundraisers: McAlister's, split the pot (raffle USM baseball game) February 2025, popcorn sales, pizza cards, silent auction, gala, laundry basket.

Other business: USM Homecoming Parade October 19 and banner ideas; Fast Signs vendor.




# JOIN US!

**SUPPORT  
AOP'S ANNUAL  
FUNDRAISER  
MONDAY, NOV. 25  
5:00 - 9:00 PM  
FUZZY'S TACO SHOP  
3102 HARDY STREET  
HATTIESBURG**



### Upcoming AOP Events

Check the AOP website for updates.

#### Executive Board Meetings

- Nov. 7, 2024, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Dec. 5, 2024, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Jan. 9, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Feb. 6, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Mar. 6, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Apr. 3, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- May 8, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Jun. 5, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

#### Professional Development

- Oct. 23, 9:00-10:00 am  
*Training: Pcard/Ecard Policies and Procedures (Teams)*
- Nov. 20, 11:30 am-12:30 pm  
*Kathy Yadrick: Healthy Eating for USM Professionals, International Center 319*
- Dec. 6 or 12 (tbd), 4:00-6:00 pm  
*Cocktails and Conversations, info to come*
- Jan. 16, 11:30 am-12:30 pm  
*Professional Goals: How Has AOP Encouraged Your Growth? (Teams)*
- Mar. 13, 11:30 am-12:30 pm  
*Organizing Your Office (Teams)*

#### Membership Meetings

- Nov. 14, 2024, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Dec. 12, 2024, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Jan. 16, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Feb. 13, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Mar. 13, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Apr. 10, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- May 15, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm
- Jun. 12, 2025, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm





# Meet Aretas Squire

## Rising Leader at USM AOP

by Dena Temple

Aretas Squire, the new Vice-President of the Association of Office Professionals (AOP) at Southern Miss, embodies the spirit of dedication and growth that characterizes the university's administrative staff.

A native of Hattiesburg, Squire's roots run deep at USM. "I have a family history with the University of Southern Mississippi," she proudly states. "My mom, my uncle, my husband, and I are all USM alumni."

Before joining USM, Squire built a diverse professional background. She worked as an economic assistance-benefit program specialist for the Mississippi Department of Human Services in Forrest County and as a payroll manager for a small business in Hattiesburg.

Aretas is currently serving as an

Administrative Specialist in the School of Humanities on USM's Hattiesburg campus and finds fulfillment in her role. "I have a passion for Business and HR," she explains. "I like working with students and faculty to teach them about campus resources and business tips." Her connection to the university is palpable: "I like working at USM; it is my home."

Squire joined AOP in May 2022 and quickly rose to leadership positions. As vice president and chair of both the membership and ways and means committees, she is responsible for enrolling new members and seeking out fundraising opportunities for the organization. She's also a member of the Mississippi Association of Educational Office Professionals (MAEOP).



Aretas Squire

Looking ahead, Squire is excited about the prospect of becoming AOP president in 2026. She's also planning to pursue an MBA from USM, building on her existing BSBA degree.

Outside of work, Squire enjoys a full family life in Hattiesburg with her husband, Jeremy (also a USM alumna), and their three children: Cameron (11), Israel (10), and Julian (1). She cherishes family vacations, kayaking, shopping, relaxing, and attending community events.

Aretas Squire's journey from local alumna to key administrative professional and emerging leader showcases the university's commitment to fostering talent from within its community. Her passion for her work, dedication to professional growth, and active involvement in organizations like AOP position her as a valuable asset to USM's administrative landscape.



Aretas and her beautiful family (l-r): Jeremy, baby Julian, Cameron, and Israel.



# Gayle Sollfrank:

## Global Perspective Meets Southern Hospitality

by Dena Temple

Gayle Sollfrank, president-elect of USM AOP, brings a unique blend of international experience and educational passion to her new role.

Born to missionary school-teachers, Gayle spent her formative years in Indonesia, an experience that shaped her global perspective. Her high school years were spent in Michigan, adding Midwest sensibility to her diverse background.

Before joining USM in 2023, Gayle worked in the Center for Teaching and Learning at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, California, and also served as an adjunct professor teaching World Civilization. This dual role provided her with valuable insights into both administrative and instructional aspects of higher education.

Currently, Gayle serves as the Assistant Director of Finance and Operations in the Center for Faculty

Development at USM. "This role aligns perfectly with my passion for education," she explains. "Coming from a long line of teachers, being dedicated to enhancing teaching and learning is incredibly fulfilling."

Gayle joined AOP in early 2023, shortly after starting at USM, on a colleague's recommendation. She quickly became involved, co-chairing the Community Service Committee. "What I appreciate most about AOP is the sense of community and the opportunities for professional growth it provides," she shares.

Looking ahead to summer 2025, when she will assume the AOP presidency, Gayle is both excited and humbled. "I'm following in the footsteps of exceptional leaders like Joyce Powell and Geneal Washam," she notes. "I'm currently

taking extensive notes and learning as much as I can from our current leadership to ensure a smooth transition."



Gayle Sollfrank

In her current role as in-service chairperson, Gayle curates guest speakers for AOP members, focusing on professional development and inspiring content.

Outside of work, Gayle and her husband, John, have found a welcoming home in Sumrall, Mississippi, a change of pace from the large metropolitan areas they lived in during John's military career. Gayle enjoys walking, baking, crafting, and reading in her free time. The couple shares their home with three very spoiled cats.

Gayle Sollfrank's journey from an international upbringing to a leadership role at USM showcases her adaptability, dedication to education, and commitment to professional growth. Her unique perspective promises to bring fresh ideas and continued excellence to her role as the upcoming AOP president.



Gayle and her husband, John, enjoy a show at the Saenger Theatre.

