



NACOP NOTES

May 2008

Message from the Co-Chairs

By: Patricia Berry, HQ
Drusilla Fratesi, MSA

Transition and changes have become common words in our daily lives, both personally and professionally. As we watch prices for our daily needs go up (food, gas, utilities, etc.), we are being exposed to advanced equipment, different methods and additional responsibilities in our work environment. As Office Professionals in an ever-changing setting, we are challenged to move forward - to keep pace with the changes. The NACOP members are committed to our mission and work towards the goal of ensuring "that ARS has highly skilled professionals working in partnership with management to meet the needs of the Agency." We encourage you to visit the NACOP website and welcome your comments on how the council can help.



Office Professional of the Year Award



For outstanding service during and after Hurricane Katrina, Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Program Support Assistant, Althea Lane Hunt, has been named the 2007 "ARS Office Professional of the Year." ARS is the chief scientific research agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Based at the ARS Southern Regional Research Center's (SRRC) Cotton Chemistry and Utilization Research Unit in New Orleans, Hunt was recognized for her exceptional service and performance of duties during and after the crises created there by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. She received a plaque and cash award during the ARS annual Recognition Program ceremony at the USDA's Jefferson Auditorium.

In addition to handling correspondence, travel arrangements, purchasing and other regular duties, Hunt played a key role in helping repatriate many of the 170 permanent SRRC employees who had been temporarily assigned to other ARS locations while the center underwent repairs for storm damage. Hunt herself was relocated to Athens, Ga. From there, she coordinated extensive travel arrangements for displaced SRRC personnel as well as handled temporary-duty processing associated with their eventual return to the center's Cotton Chemistry and Utilization Research Unit and its Cotton Structure and Quality Research Unit (CSQRU). Despite serving as Program Support Assistant for these two units, Hunt still managed to achieve one of SRRC's highest on-time travel completion rates.

"She did so despite being in unfamiliar surroundings and under significant personal duress, but maintained a positive attitude and upbeat manner that uplifted those around her," noted ARS Administrator Edward B. Knipling. Upon her own return to the center, which reopened in August 2006, Hunt helped train a new program assistant who had been hired for CSQRU to expedite that unit's operations and continuity of research.

"As a result of her outstanding service and extraordinary dedication, the lives of many SRRC employees were made easier and less stressful," Knipling added. "Ms. Hunt's exemplary performance and kindness make her truly deserving of this award."

Congratulations Althea!



National Agricultural Library Support Staff Advisory Council (NALSSAC)

By: Elizabeth Jackson, NAL

The National Agricultural Library Support Staff Advisory Council (NALSSAC) was established in December 1995 with a three-fold mission: (1) to act as a representative and liaison for all administrative and clerical employees throughout the National Agricultural Library (NAL), (2) serve management in an advisory capacity on new initiatives relating to office support, and (3) enhance the office support profession through training, mentoring, and recognition.

NALSSAC's sponsor is the Director of the Library. Peter Young, our current Director, is very supportive of the Council. The Council is made up of representatives from the Director's Office and each of the Divisions within the Library (Technical Services Division, Public Services Division, and Information Systems Division). There are currently five members on the Council and

one vacancy, Jannette Shuford-Reeves, Elizabeth Jackson, LaTasha Burl, Sharon Middleton, and Tabitha Coley.

Council accomplishments from the past and present include:

- Initiated a program for CPR and First Aid training. A Safety and Health Committee was established within the Library to take over this type of training.
- Established an NAL Secretarial and Administrative Support Handbook. This Handbook served the Library from 1996 to 2006 when the Council created the new NAL Procedures Handbook that went online. This Handbook serves as a resource to the support staff and other employees as a Standard Operating Procedure for electronic resources, emergency procedures, correspondence, forms, procurement, personnel, awards, time and attendance, travel, mail, visitors and interns, and is continually updated as needed.
- Initiated quarterly support staff luncheons with a guest speaker that focuses on issues that are pertinent to the support staff (AgLearn, HRD procedures, Web Telephone Conferencing, etc.).
- 10-Year Workforce Analysis Study –prepared a 10 year review of support staff from 1995 to 2005.



Pictured from left to right are: Raymond Williams, Maria Archer, Tabitha Coley, Nancy Day, Jannette Shuford-Reeves, Nina Ahmad, Claudia Gutierrez, Laura Pope, Fred Smith, Elizabeth Jackson and Tabitha Burl. Not available were Terry Brooks, Sharon Middleton and Rita Todaro. The T-Shirts say: "We wear many hats to help NAL to accomplish its mission."

- Participated in and helped organize a joint Administrative Professionals Day Workshop on Balancing Work and Family Life with our other two local councils (Beltsville Area Administrative Support Advisory Council (BAASAC) and the Headquarters Advisory Council for Administrative Professionals (HACAP)). The workshop, held in April 2007, was very successful and positive with a theme of working together toward a common vision.
- The Council was tasked by the NAL Management Team to perform a support staff workforce study. The Council enlisted the help of advisors from the Human Resources Division and prepared an extensive, detailed workforce study of the support staff within the NAL. The Council concluded the study with a formal presentation to the NAL Management Team giving current and possible future workforce problems and offered recommendations for solution.
- Improving the recognition of the support profession and promoting professionalism within the occupation.
- Assisting in the assessment of needs for required and appropriate training and mentoring for support staff following the lead of the National Advisory Council.
- Providing input in efforts to recruit new support staff employees, including participating in reviewing applications and interviewing of potential new hires, as requested.
- Serving as liaison between the support staff employees and the NAL Management Team and the NAL National Advisory Council representative.
- Supporting the National Advisory Council for Office Professionals by providing input on Agency-wide policies and programs which impact locally as related to the employment, development, and advancement of support staff, and by being available as a "sounding board" for the NAL Management Team on new initiatives which impact employees across the organization, such as testing and implementing new software programs, automating administrative processes and changing procedures.

NALSSAC celebrated the 2008 Administrative Professionals Day by having all the support staff wear a t-shirt that was designed especially for the day by our own Terry Brooks. The picture above shows off our wonderful and hard working support staff.

The main objectives of the Council are:

- Improving communication and awareness between support staff and the management team.

NALSSAC members work very hard and give their time and energy to maintain a strong alliance with the support staff so that the mission of the NAL and ARS is accomplished.



Submitted by Diona Austill



Spotlight on You!

Louise Dalton, Secretary to the Associate Area Director & Assistant Area Director
Northern Plains Area, Fort Collins, Colorado
Federal Service: 43 yrs - ARS Service: 41 yrs

Louise's career with ARS began in 1967 when she transferred from the Draft Board to a clerk-typist position in the Administrative Office, Weslaco, TX. She then served as Secretary to Research Leaders for Entomology, and Soil and Water also in Weslaco. In 1984 she transferred to Ft. Collins, CO, as Secretary to the Research Leader for Irrigation and Drainage and joined the Area Office as Secretary to the Area Administrative Officer in 1987. She served as Secretary to the Assistant Area Director from 1998 to 1999 and is now Secretary to the Associate Area Director and Assistant Area Director. She is a charter member of the NPA Secretarial Advisory Council, serving as Chair beginning October 1996 until November 2000. Louise was appointed NPASAC Technical Advisor beginning May 2002 and continues in that capacity.

Louise was asked the following questions for a story on long-time NPA employees in the NPA Diversity Newsletter, Voices, August 2007.

What are the biggest changes you have observed in the ARS workplace/workforce? "Computers, E-mail and all the electronic gadgets that keep administrators in contact. For example, SharePoint is great. However, because of all the technology, there is more stress that causes more illness. Safety issues have also changed

and one has to be aware of what is going on around oneself."

Why did you stay with ARS all of these years? "Due to my husband's job at the time, I took what was available in the area (Weslaco, TX) and actually liked it. When we moved to Colorado, I transferred and was really glad to stay with ARS. There are always some restrictions when you have a family but I don't regret any of that. I enjoy what I do and always have, plus I have been lucky enough to have good people to work with all these years. I've never let the few exceptions to that bother me. As long as I feel good, I intend to work. Money doesn't hurt anything either, even though people tell me that it is not worth working after about 42 years. That depends on why you are working, it must be my hobby now!"

What advice would you give to a new ARS employee? "Do the best that you can possibly do, no matter what the job is. And don't take things personally. Treat others like you would like to be treated. Don't lose your sense of humor."

Larry Chandler, Associate Area Director, says this about Louise. "Louise is probably one of a very few current ARS employees who has known me personally during my entire tenure with ARS. I first met her when I started my career in Weslaco, but never thought I'd actually have the chance to work with her as I do now. It's just one of those interesting twists of fate that we both ended up in Ft. Collins. She has especially been helpful to me since I became a part of the Northern Plains in 1994 with my transfer to Brookings, SD. She has a lot of institutional knowledge about ARS and has been an excellent resource. Since coming to the Area Office in late 2004 she has been a daily part of my work life and has provided great support to me. Louise's best attribute is her attitude. She is always positive and looks for the best in all her fellow employees. She's customer service oriented and strives to help others. It's been my pleasure to have known her and now worked with her and I hope that will continue for many more years."

Dr. Mickey McGuire, the Assistant Area Director joined the Area staff in May 2006. As he left his previous position in California, his secretary told him "Louise is the best!" Mickey commented, "So, far and wide Louise is known for her knowledge of ARS, her diligence to getting things done right the first time and for her sense of humor. I have enjoyed working with Louise the past two years and look forward to the next 42!"

Keep learning opportunities open

NOT ALL BRIGHT minds are the result of classroom learning. A few examples:

- Jack London, author, received his education at public libraries. He tried college, but found it dull.
- Colin Powell was merely an OK student, but he grew up in a home filled with books. As a young man, he read constantly.
- Benjamin Franklin quit school at age 10 and set up a program of self-education, including science, philosophy and foreign languages.

What did they all have in common? They devoured books. Don't have time to read? Remember how much you'll gain by reading each day: Biographies offer lessons in character and problem solving. Fiction allows your creative mind to run free. Magazines and newsletters help you spot trends and grow professionally.

Of course, if you're reading this now, you know just what we're talking about.

- Adapted from *Building Character: Strengthening the Heart of Good Leadership* by Gene Klann. 2007. John Wiley & Sons. p. 9.



GRAMMAR Repair Shop

Rules for Comma Use

1. *Use a comma to separate the elements in a series (three or more things), including the last two.* "He hit the ball, dropped the bat, and ran to first base." You may have learned that the comma before the "and" is unnecessary, which is fine if you're in control of things. However, there are situations in which, if you don't use this comma (especially when the list is complex or lengthy), these last two items in the list will try to glom together (like macaroni and cheese). Using a comma between all the items in a series, including the last two, avoids this problem. This last comma—the one between the word "and" and the preceding word—is often called the *serial comma* or the *Oxford comma*. In newspaper writing, incidentally, you will seldom find a serial comma, but that is not necessarily a sign that it should be omitted in academic prose.
2. *Use a comma + a little conjunction (and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so) to connect two independent clauses,* as in "He hit the ball well, but he ran toward third base." Contending that the coordinating conjunction is adequate separation, some writers will leave out the comma in a sentence with short, balanced independent clauses (such as we see in the example just given). If there is ever any doubt, however, use the comma, as it is always correct in this situation. One of the most frequent errors in comma usage is the placement of a comma after a coordinating conjunction. We cannot say that the comma will always come before the conjunction and never after, but it would be a rare event, indeed, that we need to follow a coordinating conjunction with a comma. When speaking, we do sometimes pause after the little conjunction, but there is seldom a good reason to put a comma there.
3. *Use a comma to set off introductory elements,* as in "Running toward third base, he suddenly realized how stupid he looked." It is permissible to omit the comma after a brief introductory element if the omission does not result in confusion or hesitancy in reading. If there is ever any doubt, use the comma, as it is always correct.
4. *Use a comma to set off parenthetical elements,* as in "The Founders Bridge, which spans the Connecticut River, is falling down." By "parenthetical element," we mean a part of a sentence that can be removed without changing the essential meaning of that sentence. The parenthetical element is sometimes called "added information." This is the most difficult rule in punctuation because it is sometimes unclear what is "added" or "parenthetical" and what is essential to the meaning of a sentence.
5. *Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives.* You could think of this as "That tall, distinguished, good looking fellow" rule (as opposed to "the little old lady"). If you can put an and or a but between the adjectives, a comma will probably belong there. For instance, you could say, "He is a tall and distinguished fellow" or "I live in a very old and run-down house." So you would write, "He is a tall,

distinguished man" and "I live in a very old, run-down house." But you would probably not say, "She is a little and old lady," or "I live in a little and purple house," so commas would not appear between little and old or between little and purple.

6. *Use a comma to set off quoted elements.* Because we don't use quoted material all the time, even when writing, this can be a difficult rule to remember in comma usage. It is a good idea to find a page from an article that uses several quotations, photocopy that page, and keep it in front of you as a model when you're writing. Generally, use a comma to separate quoted material from the rest of the sentence that explains or introduces the quotation:

Summing up this argument, Peter Coveney writes, "The purpose and strength of the romantic image of the child had been above all to establish a relation between childhood and adult consciousness."

If an attribution of a quoted element comes in the middle of the quotation, two commas will be required. But be careful not to create a comma splice in so doing.

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many things."

"I should like to buy an egg, please," she said timidly. "How do you sell them?"

Be careful *not* to use commas to set off quoted elements introduced by the word *that* or quoted elements that are embedded in a larger structure:

Peter Coveney writes that "[t]he purpose and strength of . . ."

We often say "Sorry" when we don't really mean it.

And, instead of a comma, use a colon to set off explanatory or introductory language from a quoted element that is either very formal or long (especially if it's longer than one sentence):

Peter Coveney had this to say about the nineteenth-century's use of children in fiction: "The purpose and strength of"

7. *Use commas to set off phrases that express contrast.*

Some say the world will end in ice, not fire.

It was her money, not her charm or personality, that first attracted him.

The puppies were cute, but very messy.

8. *Use a comma to avoid confusion.* This is often a matter of consistently applying rule #3.

For most the year is already finished.

For most, the year is already finished.

Outside the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.

Outside, the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.

9. *Grammar English's Famous Rule of Punctuation:* Never use a comma between a subject and its verb. "Believing completely and positively in oneself is essential for success." [Although readers might pause after the word "oneself," there is no reason to put a comma there.]

10. *Typographical Reasons:* Between a city and a state [Hartford, Connecticut], a date and the year [June 15, 1997], a name and a title when the title comes after the name [Bob Downey, Professor of English], in long numbers [5,456,783 and \$14,682], etc. Although you will often see a comma between a name and suffix — Bob Downey, Jr., Richard Harrison, III — this comma is no longer regarded as necessary by most copy editors, and some individuals — such as Martin Luther King Jr. — never used a comma there at all.

11. *Use commas with caution.* As you can see, there are many reasons for using commas, and we haven't listed them all. Yet the biggest problem that most students have with commas is their overuse. Some essays look as though the student loaded a shotgun with commas and blasted away. Remember, too, that a pause in reading is not always a reliable reason to use a comma. Try not to use a comma unless you can apply a specific rule from this page to do so.

Concentrating on the proper use of commas is not mere form for form's sake. Indeed, it causes writers to review their understanding of structure and to consider carefully how their sentences are crafted.

Adapted from:
<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/commas.htm>