



OCIO — Information Technology Services ITS Connections

Issue 11 March 16, 2007



Building up by Reaching Out: USDA's Scholarship & Internship Programs

ITS has a cadre of new energy in its ranks: six interns who are working with the Technical Support Division at offices across the country. They are part of an extensive group of programs run by the Office of Human Capital Management that brings skilled and energetic new employees to USDA and offers them important educational opportunities and job experiences. USDA's student opportunities are designed to combine academic studies with on-the-job training and experience and to give students an opportunity to work with USDA while completing their education.

USDA provides undergraduate and graduate students with paid opportunities to serve as assistants to scientists, professionals, administrators, IT specialists, and other sorts of technical employees. Each USDA Mission Area or Agency manages its own programs. USDA also provides opportunities for persons to fulfill their career goals through challenging internships that provide a path to permanent employment.

Steven Spanbauer, left, is an intern with TSD-SD. ITS' other interns are- Susan April, TSD-New England/VT; Vickie Harper, TSD-KY; Ash Miller, TSD-MS; Michael Cole, TSD-TX; and Scott McCulloch, TSD-LO/FW.



USDA 1890 National Scholars Program

The Department has a long tradition with land-grant colleges, including sponsorship of a variety of fellowship and scholarship programs that also help bring new talent to USDA. Among these is a special relationship with the eighteen *1890 Historically Black Land-Grant Institutions* and Tuskegee University. The program helps to strengthen the partnership between USDA and the 1890 institutions; helps to increase the number of students studying agriculture and related disciplines; and offers career opportunities at USDA. ITS has three employees who were 1890 scholars: Andrea Minter at WCTS-Washington Network Services; Scott Hawkins, TSD-AL; and Vickie Harper, TSD-KY.

THE PROOF IS IN THE PROGRAM- VICKIE HARPER'S THOUGHTS ON THE 1890 PROGRAM:

As a former USDA 1890 Scholar, I had the opportunity to participate in a great networking environment, including the community of USDA/1890 Scholar Alumni, with a continual growth of corporate and personal knowledge.

In seeking other opportunities within USDA upon graduation, I joined the Federal Career Internship Program. I am employed as an Information Technology Specialist here in Bowling Green, KY. I must say that I am very fortunate to be a part of an exceptional group of working professionals within the Kentucky Group of TSD. I have been performing such duties as new software installations, deployment of new equipment, installations of new software projects, etc. I am anticipating this experience to lead to a very promising career as an IT professional within USDA.



Photo: Vickie Harper, Intern and 1890 National Scholar (Graduated).

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Spring Calendar

Women's History Month	All March
Spring Begins	Mar. 20
Taxes Due	April 15
Earth Day	April 22
Optimum deadline for Security Awareness	May 30
USDA Deadline for Security Awareness	June 30

Contact Us at:
ITS Connections
Kathy Marshall,
ITS Communications Team Lead
mailto:ITS-Connections@wdc.usda.gov

Continued on next page.

If you know anyone interested in these opportunities, there is plenty of information.



The 1890 Scholarships ARE AWARDED

ANNUALLY. Each award provides annual tuition, employment, employee benefits, use of a lap-

top computer, printer, and software while on scholarship, fees (lab and activity), books, and room & board for each of the 4 academic years. Each annual scholarship renewal is contingent upon satisfactory performance and normal progress toward the bachelor's degree. Upon completion of the scholar's academic degree program, there is an obligation of 1 year of service to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for each year of financial support. For more information about the USDA National Scholars Program, contact:

USDA/1890 Programs
Telephone: (202) 205-5692
Email: 1890nit@usda.gov
Webpage: <http://www.ascr.usda.gov/outreach.html>

Student Opportunities, Internships, and Scholarships

<http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/intern.htm>

USDA provides available internship opportunity listings, online applications, and information on the application process for those wishing to apply.

High School Internships <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/high-school-students.htm>

There are a number of opportunities geared specifically for high school students, such as volunteer work and paid summer internships.

College Internships <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/college-students.htm>

College students wishing to further enhance their agricultural knowledge to gain a competitive edge in their career development can gain positions within USDA's college internship programs.

Graduate Internships <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/graduate.htm>

Graduate students can apply to one of USDA's opportunities geared for students doing graduate work at universities.

Recent Graduate and Experienced Professional Internships

<http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/RCG&EP.htm>

USDA offers a number of career internships for individuals with an interest in starting a career at USDA.

1890 Scholars Program <http://www.usda.gov/cr/outreach.html>

The National Scholars Program is a joint effort between USDA and 18 historically black land-grant institutions to award scholarships for students to attend these universities.

International Fellowship Program <http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/grants/grantsiii.html>

USDA offers international fellowships to qualified students enrolled in postgraduate programs related to agriculture or biological sciences.

William Helms Scholarship Program

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/recruitment/students/helms/index.html>

USDA offers tuition assistance, mentoring, and summer work to college students interested in pursuing a career related plant pathology, biology, virology, ecology, and entomology.

Veterinary Student Employment Program

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Careers/Program_Overview/index.asp

USDA offers an opportunity for students enrolled in an accredited veterinary school to work with USDA veterinarians as mentees.

REMINDER: BEAT THE RUSH TO SECURITY AWARENESS,

TRY TO COMPLETE YOUR TRAINING BY MAY 30



In mid-February, an email notification began circulating from Lynn Allen, ACIO-Cyber Security, informing all USDA employees, including contractors and partners with access to government information systems, that the new round of security awareness training courses on AgLearn must be completed by June 30, 2007. We recommend completing them by May 30. AgLearn also suggests being ahead of the curve to avoid any system slowdown if thousands of people across USDA rush to take their courses in the few weeks before the due date.

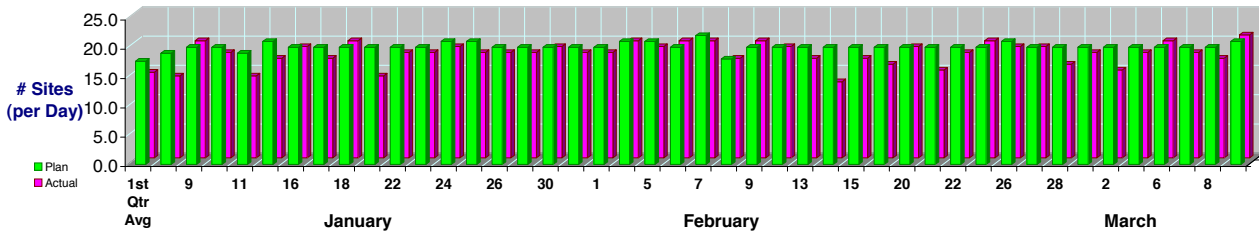
Any problems with course content should be reported to Cyber Security at <mailto:cyber.communication@usda.gov> or by telephone at 1-877-299-8329.

Password problems should be reported to eAuthentication at <mailto:eAuthHelpDesk@ftc.usda.gov> or by telephone at 1-800-457-3642.

10 Easy Steps to Security and Privacy Awareness

- > Log onto AgLearn at <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>
- > Go to **Learning > Curriculum Status**. [This can be also done by clicking on **Go to Curriculum Status** on the AgLearn Welcome page.]
- > Click **USDA Security Literacy and Privacy Basics FY 2007**.
- > Click **Launch Content** for the first module, **AgLearn System Check Tool**.
- > Click **Click here to check your computer's settings**. This is **VERY IMPORTANT**: this lets you know if your computer has the correct software versions to run your courses. This will save you lots of time if you are taking the training on non-ITS equipment.
- > Ensure that pop-ups are enabled.
- > Click **USDA Security Literacy and Privacy Basics FY 2007**.
- > Click **Security Literacy and Basics Module**.
- > After you have successfully completed the assessment for this module, exit from the course. You will be returned to **Online Content Structure**. From here return to Curriculum Status to access Privacy Basics to complete the course.
- > Launch the content for **Privacy Basics**.
- > After you have successfully completed the assessment for this module, exit from the course. You will be returned to **Online Content Structure**. From here return to **Curriculum Status** to launch the final module, **USDA Security Awareness and Privacy Basics FY07**. Launch the contents of this module to receive instructions on how to print your completion certificate.

UTN PROGRESS, 2ND QTR 07: 1527 SITES MIGRATED (3/14)



"YOUR EMAIL IS ABOVE ITS SIZE LIMIT!" - HOW TO CLEAR OUT THE SENT ITEMS

If you or your customers are tired of receiving emails that say "your mailbox is over its size limit", here are a couple of things that you can do to clear some space.

CLEAN OUT YOUR SENT ITEMS:

1. Open Outlook. If you can see a list of folders that includes a "Sent Items" folder, skip to step 3.
2. If you don't see a sent items folder, go to the "View" menu and select "Folders List"
3. Click on your "Sent Items" folder. It holds a copy of any message that you have sent from your email account.
4. Delete messages that you do not need to keep copies of. These messages will go to the "Deleted Items" folder.

AUTOMATICALLY DELETE YOUR DELETED ITEMS:

To automatically clear out your Deleted Items empty everytime you close Outlook:

1. Open Outlook.
2. Go to the "Tools" menu and select "Options"
3. Go to the "Other" tab.
4. Check the box beside "Empty the Deleted Items folder upon exiting"
5. Click OK.

Taking these steps should help to prevent constant warnings about the size limit of the your email box.



WE NEED YOUR TIPS & SOLUTIONS

ITS employees in all divisions have pretty much seen everything that can impact an IT system and its end-users. We need you to share your observations, ideas, solutions, and tips and help us build a useful knowledgebase and a dynamic tips column. Please contact us at:

ITS-Connections@wdc.usda.gov

Field Perspectives: Technical Support Division Profiles

ITS Connections now features profiles of Technical Support Division (TSD) teams around the country to introduce and recognize team members and their significant contributions to the success of USDA Service Center Agency missions. FSA, NRCS, and RD provide an estimated \$50 billion dollars of programs, financial support, and technical assistance to America's farmers and rural communities each year.

Just as the highway system is a shared infrastructure that transports our nation's people and products across the country, the ITS infratructure is key to delivering SCA programs. But, ours is a superhighway to every agency service center office, no matter how small or remote, because every agency office requires the same access to applications, services, databases, bandwidth and speed.

Where ITS meets our customers on a daily basis is in those offices - large and small. The Technical Support Division, ITS' largest section of about 600 people, provides that ongoing stream of support to our customer base of 60,000 agency personnel and agency partners.

To add context for each state we cover, a box outlines some agricultural facts and funding levels of agency programs. This information is from:

- ERS State Fact Sheets - <http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/>
- FSA State Accomplishment Fact Sheets - (from state offices)
- NRCS' FY06 Program Allocations - <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/> (scroll to page bottom)
- RD 2005-2006 Progress Report - http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/pubs/2005_06_Prog_Report.pdf

Special thanks to TSD Group Manager Antonia Ayler and the Pennsylvania TSD Team for the article and pictures; communications staff at FSA and NRCS; and the writers of the RD Progress Report.

PENNSYLVANIA TECHNICAL SUPPORT
DIVISION TEAM

Photo: from left to right, Michael Cornett, Lenore Hocker, Robert Murphy, and Natalie Dibert.

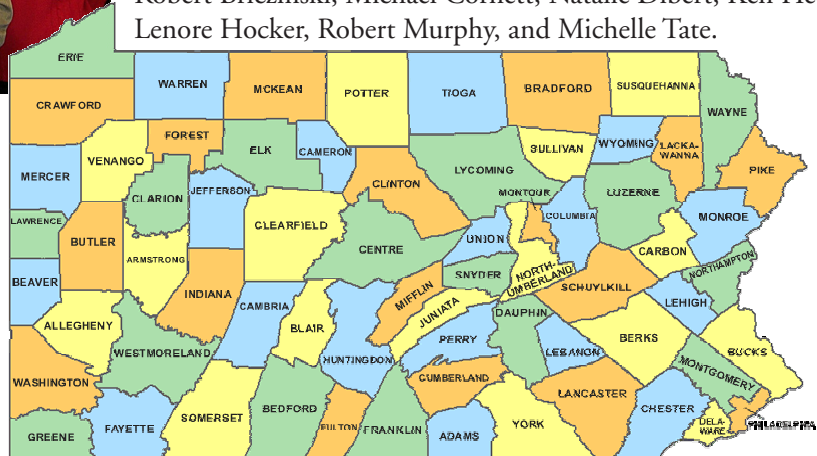


The Pennsylvania ITS Team consists of eight staff members and a group manager. They support 67 counties and over 1,200 users. The state office is located in Harrisburg, which is the capital. Two team members along with the group manager are located at the state office and the other six members are located at six different service centers throughout the state.

Current staff are Antonia Ayler, Group Manager, Christopher Booth, Robert Briczinski, Michael Cornett, Natalie Dibert, Ken Heer, Lenore Hocker, Robert Murphy, and Michelle Tate.



Photo: Antonia Ayler, PA Group Manager.



FACTS ABOUT PENNSYLVANIA--

Nickname: Keystone State - During colonial times Pennsylvania was the middle colony of the original 13 colonies. It held the colonies together like the "keystone" in a window or door arch.

Background: Pennsylvania was settled in 1643. Philadelphia was our state capital during the Revolutionary War and York was the first capital of the United States.

Important Documents: Several important documents were written in Pennsylvania:

- ☞ The Constitution of the United States
- ☞ The American Declaration of Independence
- ☞ Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Flower: Mountain Laurel

Tree: Hemlock

Insect: Firefly

Dog: Great Dane

Significant Roadway:

The first long-distance rural freeway in the United States opened in 1940, it was called the Pennsylvania Turnpike and was popularly known as the "tunnel highway" because of the seven mountain tunnels along its route.



The turnpike was partially built on an unused railroad grade constructed

for the aborted South Pennsylvania Railroad project. Six of its seven original tunnels were first bored for that railroad.

The Turnpike allowed all traffic, not just cars, and like the German Autobahn on which it was loosely based, there was no enforced speed limit on most of the road--some cars could travel at 100 mph (160 km/h) and traverse the entire 110 mile (177 km) original segment in slightly over an hour.

Today, the Turnpike is controlled by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, handles over 172 million vehicles

per year, and employs nearly 2,200 people.

Pennsylvania Service Center Agency Statistics

58,105 farms on 28.7 million acres (2005); about 61,051 farmers (2002); 967,427 people employed in the ag sector (2002); and about 1,989,384 rural residents (2005) - (from ERS Data Sheets).

Below are agency allocations for their program and service areas (in millions of dollars).

FSA (FY2005)	NRCS Programs (FY 2006)	RD Programs (FY 2006)
Farm Loans - \$ 50.6	Environmental Quality Incentives Program - \$ 13.8	Rural Housing - \$ 154.5
Farm Support - \$ 92.3	Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program - \$ 2.8	Rural Business & Cooperatives - \$ 59.4
Disaster Relief - \$ 12.9	Wetlands Reserve Program - \$ 0.35	Rural Utilities - \$ 79.7
Conservation - \$ 19.5	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program - \$ 0.19	
	Combined Financial & Technical Assistance Programs - \$ 17.1	



Photo: Ken Heer checking the inventory.



Photo: Chris Booth, enroute.

NEWS OVERTIME AND PREMIUM PAY PRIMER I: OVERTIME BASICS

This is the first in a series of articles about overtime and premium pay that we plan to publish in upcoming ITS Connections. These articles are not intended to cover all aspects of overtime and premium pay; instead, we plan to focus on covering basic ITS guidelines, policies and procedures for selected overtime and other premium pay issues.

The Basic Laws. The two basic laws that cover overtime entitlement for Federal employees are TITLE 5 OF THE UNITED STATES CODE and the FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT (FLSA). There are two types of compensation for overtime work: **OVERTIME PAY** and **COMPENSATORY TIME OFF**.

Glossary:

FLSA provides the minimum standards for both wages and overtime entitlement, along with the administrative procedures by which covered work time must be compensated. All employees' positions are designated as either "**exempt**" (not covered by the FLSA) or "**nonexempt**" (covered by the FLSA). You can find your FLSA status on your most recent SF 50, Notification of Personnel Action (block 35), on your official position description, or by contacting your supervisor or one of the Human Resources (HR) Specialists listed at the end of this article.

Overtime pay generally means additional pay received for performing overtime work that has been officially ordered and approved. The work hours that are considered overtime differ somewhat depending on your type of work schedule, and will be discussed later in this article.

Premium pay, authorized under Title 5, includes pay for night, holiday, Sunday, and some other types of work, that is in addition to your basic pay rate. For FLSA exempt employees, it also includes overtime pay and regular compensatory time, but does not include compensatory time for travel. Federal regulations do not specifically define overtime pay and compensatory time as premium pay for employees who are FLSA nonexempt. However, overtime pay and related compensatory time for FLSA nonexempt employees are frequently discussed under the topic of premium pay.

"**Suffered or permitted**" work means any work you perform for the benefit of the agency, whether requested or not, provided your supervisor knows or has reason to believe that the work is being performed, and has an opportunity to prevent the work from being performed. This concept applies only to FLSA nonexempt employees on fixed work schedules. It does not apply to FLSA exempt employees or FLSA nonexempt employees on flexible work schedules. Typically, management must order and approve overtime.

Managers and supervisors with delegated overtime approval authority are responsible for controlling the use of overtime. Overtime generally should be kept to a minimum and approved beforehand and within budgetary limitations. You should not work hours in excess of your approved work schedule and expect compensation unless a supervisor or manager orders or approves the extra hours.

DETERMINING OVERTIME WORK HOURS

FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES (FWS). Overtime work includes all hours in excess of 8 hours in a day or 40 hours in a week that are officially ordered and approved in advance. If you have chosen a work schedule that has a day with more than 8 hours or a week with more than 40 hours, these hours are not considered as ordered and approved overtime.

Also, overtime work does not include credit hours, which are worked voluntarily with supervisory approval. Another thing to remember is FLSA exempt and FLSA nonexempt FWS employees cannot earn overtime pay by working "suffered or permitted" hours.

COMPRESSED WORK SCHEDULES (CWS). For full-time FLSA exempt employees, overtime hours are those officially ordered and approved in excess of the compressed schedule for the day. For full-time FLSA nonexempt employees, overtime hours are those in excess of the compressed work schedule that are officially ordered and approved or "suffered or permitted."

Note: The rules above apply to full-time employees. There are some variations for part-timers, but we'll spare you these since they seldom come into play with ITS.

That concludes the first installment of our overtime and premium pay primer series. If you have questions about any of the information in this article or about overtime pay in general, you may contact Phyllis Hall of ITS' Employee Services Branch at 314-335-8711 or <mailto:phyllis.hall@stl.usda.gov>, or Theresa Sayger, Administrative Resource Center, Bureau of Public Debt at 304-480-8266 or <mailto:payroll@bpd.treas.gov>.

Coming next: Overtime and Premium Pay Primer II – Determining Pay

AMD-EMPLOYEE SERVICES BRANCH WELCOMES CHERYL CANNON, HR SPECIALIST

Cheryl Cannon joined the ITS Administrative Services Division



March 4, 2007, as a Human Resources (HR) Specialist in the Employee Services Branch (ESB). She will take on the responsibility of ITS AgLearn administrator and other Employee Services Branch activities. Cheryl has worked in human resources (HR) for the last 22 years.

Her federal service started in 1977 in her home town of New Orleans, LA, where she worked for the Department of Navy as a clerk. She then worked for the State of

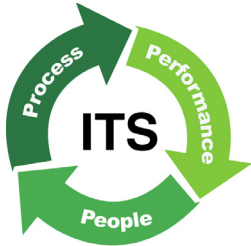
Louisiana as a welfare worker and in the private sector with intermittent periods of federal service.

She finally settled on a federal career in 1983. Cheryl has worked with personnel processing, classification, staffing, employee benefits, and retirement. She has worked for several federal agencies—the Navy, Army, Postal Service, Defense Investigative Services, National Archives and Records Administration, Social Security, and, last but certainly not least, the Department of Agriculture. Cheryl comes to us from an HR Specialist position in Rural Development, where she worked for the last 18 years. Her varied experience in a number of agencies should make her a valuable addition to ESB.

Cheryl's duty station is St. Louis, Missouri. Her phone number is (314) 335-8416; her email address is: <mailto:cheryl.cannon@stl.usda.gov>.

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 Infrastructure Governance
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Thrift Savings Plan- Give Yourself a 4% Raise..Every Year!

from
 Nancy Palmer,
 AMD- ESB

If you are a Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employee and you are not taking full advantage of the Government matching on your Thrift Savings Program (TSP) account, you can give yourself a raise.

If you are a Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) employee, TSP is still a good investment even without the matching, because your contribution to TSP is pre-tax, that is, it isn't counted as taxable income.

The Details. For FERS employees, using a GS-11/5 rate of pay as an example, your raise could be as much as \$2,398 per year that would be deposited to your TSP account. With your contribution *and* the additional Government matching portion (not including the automatic 1%), over a period of just 10 years, you will have accumulated approximately \$53,970, and that's without considering growth on your investment over those 10 years or any salary increases you might have that would raise the amount contributed. Of course there is no guarantee for growth, but for more information regarding historical growth of the various TSP funds, go to: <http://www.tsp.gov/rates/monthly-history.html>.

TSP Keeps Improving. Many financial advisers consider the TSP as a model plan with many aspects of it being better than the private sector 401(k) retirement plans. Despite an already excellent reputation, the TSP keeps improving and offering new options to employees. The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board (FRTIB) runs the TSP and recently contracted for a study of federal employees to find out their views and what they would like to see in the future for TSP. The survey of employees showed that they are generally more satisfied with the plan than comparable private sector employees are with their 401(k) plans. Participants responded that they are satisfied with the administration of the plan and the web-based information provided to them. FERS members identified the matching contributions as their key reason for contributing, while CSRS employees noted tax benefits as their primary reason for contributing. For the future, participants indicated they would like to see a Roth 401(k) option, and generally were in favor of adding additional investment options to the TSP.

Meet Your Match - Get Your 4%

Most Federal employees who are FERS already take full advantage of the matching in the TSP, but, there are still thousands who are not; in effect, they are refusing free money. If you are FERS and are not contributing at least 5% of your salary to TSP, you are not receiving your full matching benefit and you are costing yourself money.

For a GS-11/5, the 5% contribution would be approximately \$115 per pay period. If you think you cannot afford that amount per pay period, keep in mind that you will also save on taxes, because your TSP contributions are held out pre-tax from your paycheck. For most of us, we can maximize contributions and matching by just giving up an occasional dinner out or some small luxury. Another approach is to increase your contributions over time in smaller, less noticeable amounts of 1 or 2%.

For FERS employees, the Government contribution to your TSP is an automatic 1% of your pay whether you participate or not. Then, if you contribute, your contributions are

Percent of Basic Pay Contributed to Your Account (FERS Employees Only)

You put in:	Your agency puts in:		And the total contribution is:
	Automatic (1%) Contribution	Agency Matching Contribution	
0%	1%	0%	1%
1%	1%	1%	3%
2%	1%	2%	5%
3%	1%	3%	7%
4%	1%	3.5%	8.5%
5%	1%	4%	10%

Note: Amounts that you contribute above 5% are not matched.

matched dollar-for-dollar on the first 3% of pay for each pay period, and then 50 cents on the dollar for the next 2% of pay (see table above). So, even though our cost of living raise was a little lower than usual in 2007, those of you who are not yet enjoying your full TSP matching benefits can give yourself a substantial raise that will benefit you for years to come.