

The AgLearn Vine

Issue 6

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**AgLearn Administrator Training Workshop 2009**

Team AgLearn conducted a three day training workshop for AgLearn Leads and other select administrators from October 6th through 8th, 2009.

The training workshop was led by Senior Training Analyst Kathy Fallow and was held simultaneously in the Economic Resource Services (ERS) training room at 1800 M Street in Washington, DC. Adobe Connect Sessions with real time audio and video were also available in order to accommodate administrators that could not participate in person.

Training topics included: AgLearn reports, Captivate training, supervisor and subordinates account set up, competencies, assessments and skill gaps, integrating Individual Development Plans (IDPs) with competencies, managing curricula, AgLearn's Automatic Ticketing System (ATS) polices and procedures, and a presentation from Ninth House.

Overall, the feedback from workshop participants was very positive. In fact, the workshop concluded with a collaborative discussion between Team AgLearn and participants about conducting similar workshops and recommendations for future training topics.

Team AgLearn would like to thank all of the administrators who participated in the workshop, especially the facilitator and host the of the ERS training room, Sharon Smallwood.

## AgLearn Emails

While users might find AgLearn notifications inconvenient, we would like to take a moment to explain the purpose of these emails and the results of our communication campaigns.

Feedback received from user surveys reveals that those who complete the available courseware in AgLearn rate it very highly. Anecdotal feedback regarding Books24x7 is also extremely positive. However, while so many USDA employees are taking advantage of these resources available at no cost to them, many are still unaware of the vast collection of information at their fingertips. Our goal is to increase the utilization of these highly rated learning resources by making all employees aware of their availability. Our campaigns include executive briefings, workshops, webinars and newsletters, but none of these communication methods is as effective as our targeted emails. Here are some statistics:

**Example #1:** A recent email on Telecommuting courses saw a large percentage increase in course completions shortly after the emails were distributed. The actual percentage increase was 19,100%. That is not a typo. More than a nineteen thousand percent increase just because we sent an email.

**Example#2:** Our email defining a "QuickTalk" showcased a variety of subjects was sent to all employees and resulted in over 2,234 new assignments to learning plans within just a few days of the email distribution. Completion rates increased over 27,566%.

**Example #3:** An Innovation topic email was distributed in July that resulted in a completion percentage increase of 2,720%.

These are typical increases, realized every time an email distribution is sent out. Increased awareness results in increased use. Team AgLearn measures the success of each email campaign and we can provide our metrics in spreadsheet form if you wish to review them. Starting in November, this data will be distributed to the Agency leads on a monthly basis.

For those of you who are slightly annoyed when an email received is not of interest to you, we apologize that we cannot currently offer an "unsubscribe" option and suggest that you simply delete the message if you choose not to read it. Please understand, however, that the realized success of these emails means that they will probably continue for some time, at least until they cease to yield the results we are currently experiencing. As an AgLearn administrator, we hope that you will address this concern with our explanation if and when you encounter it.

More importantly, these emails expose employees to a wide variety of online training which results in reduced cost to the agency by decreasing classroom based courses and travel.

| Communication Topic     | Recent Completions Prior | Recent Completions During | Percentage Increase |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Example 1 Telecommuting | 1                        | 191                       | 19,100%             |
| Example 2 QuickTalks    | 6                        | 1,654                     | 27,566%             |
| Example 3 Innovation    | 5                        | 136                       | 2,720%              |

## **ACE Program Update**

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The American Council on Education (ACE) sets rigorous standards and guidelines for certifying educational institutions to deliver official ACE curriculum programs. These guidelines dictate how to configure ACE curriculum, which courses qualify, how accessible these courses can be to end-users, and how we must administer tests and examinations. To qualify USDA as an official ACE educational institution, Team AgLearn has implemented our ACE curricula so that end-users will be required to complete each individual course within 30 days of it first being launched. In addition, all curriculum courseware must be marked as completed in AgLearn prior to granting user access to exams. Finally, all exam participation must be conducted through a proctoring process.

The proctoring process will require proctors to enter an unlock code into AgLearn, which will allow users to access ACE exams. Upon successful completion of the exam, the proctor must reenter this code so that the user can get credit. This is why it's critical to have designated proctors and establish an exam proctoring process. It is important to note that the proctor only needs to sit during the exam, not the course.

Team AgLearn has announced the release of the ACE program to USDA senior management. In order for agencies to take advantage of this opportunity, each agency will need to identify individuals to act as ACE proctors who know how to manage their exam proctoring process.

To participate, each agency must assign a coordinator or central point of contact for these proctors. This Agency ACE Proctor Coordinator (APC) can also act as a liaison to Team AgLearn and will be responsible for developing and maintaining an accurate, up to date list of agency proctors and notifying Team AgLearn when that list is updated. The APC will notify Team AgLearn of their designate proctors so they can be entered into the system. The APC will also serve as the agency's initial point of contact for the ACE Program, so that students have a single point of contact to enter the program. After the APC assign a proctor to student, the assigned proctor will become the POC for the student from that point forward.

AgLearn is very excited about the unique and wonderful opportunity that ACE Program will provide to all USDA employees. To ensure that the ACR Program reaches its full potential, we need every agency to provide proctoring support.

## **New SkillSoft Resources**

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In the last quarter of FY09, SkillSoft and Team AgLearn have been working together to bring you even more resources including courses, videos, books, test preps and other resources to AgLearn. Among the new resources that have been added include courses aligned to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Fourth Edition!

We've updated the list of new releases from SkillSoft located on the splash page. Also, check out the new folders in [Books24x7](#).

We've created specific folders that contain new releases as well as recommended books. The current folders pictured to the right can be found on the left side of the Books24x7 site.

## How Did Your Agency Rank For FY09 Discretionary Training? page 4

Another fiscal year has passed and the numbers are in. The table provides the list of agencies ranked by the combined number of assignments and completions. These percentages were calculated by adding the total number of assignments and completions and dividing by the total number of active users per agency. Assignments are defined as items that have been accessed by a learner but not completed. Completions are those items that have been marked completed in their learning history. These numbers are combined to show the whole picture for discretionary training. Why include assignments? There are times when a learner is searching for a particular piece of information. For example, if a learner wants to learn how to create graphs in Microsoft Excel 2007, he/she can access a course and learn how to create a graph by not completing the course. Even though the item was not completed, the learner found the information that was needed.

| USDA Agency             | Average Total of Assignments/Completions Per Learner |
|-------------------------|--|
| NIFA (formerly CSREES)  | 372.04%  |
| APHIS                   | 366.80%  |
| RD                      | 323.91%  |
| FSIS                    | 286.86%  |
| NASS                    | 257.00%  |
| GIPSA                   | 250.23%  |
| FSA                     | 249.67%  |
| AMS                     | 242.24%  |
| RMA                     | 215.93%  |
| FNS                     | 191.89%  |
| FS                      | 180.15%  |
| FAS                     | 179.19%  |
| ARS                     | 147.27%  |
| NRCS                    | 115.50%  |
| Departmental Management | 105.34%  |
| ERS                     | 82.74%   |

## Most Popular USDA Resources

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[Performance-based Appraisal: An Employee View](#)

[Avoiding Grammatical Errors in Business Writing](#)

[Environmental Management Systems \(EMS\)](#)

[10 steps to getting organized](#)

[First Aid--CPR](#)

[QuickTalks: How to Influence People You Don't Control](#)

## FY09 Top USDA Books

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[175 Ways to Get More Done in Less Time!](#)

[100 Ways to Motivate Yourself: Change Your Life Forever, Revised Edition](#)

[The Power of Charm: How to Win Anyone Over in Any Situation](#)

[Better Vocabulary in 30 Minutes a Day](#)

It is that time of year again for all USDA employees, partners, and contractors to complete their annual Information Security Awareness (ISA) Training, but do not fret. The ISA Planning Team, comprised largely of Agency representatives, has gone to great lengths, since last year, to ensure that this year's (FY10) training is a successful and rewarding experience while still meeting all federal guidelines and requirements for its completion.

So, how is the training changing this year (FY10) from last year (FY09)? The answer to this question is: not much. Through thoughtful analysis and consideration, the ISA Planning Team decided to reuse last year's course with a few minor changes needed to cover additional content required by the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the National Institute of Technology and Standards (NIST).

The ISA Planning Team evaluated three courses for use during the USDA's FY10 ISA mandatory training period. This included an evaluation of the SkillSoft ISA course available in AgLearn, the newly released DoD FY10 Federal Information System Security Awareness (ISSA) course, and reusing last year's (FY09) training. Each course was evaluated for relevancy of content, learning effectiveness, user friendliness, ability to implement with minimal technical issues, ability to convert to a PDF for use as a paper-based alternative, and its ability to improve each user's overall training experience.

The primary reason for reusing the FY09 course was that paper-based materials already existed and would not need to be remade as it would be for a new course. Additionally, many feedback reports from the FY09 course showed that its user friendliness was high. The course also contains most of the required educational topics needed to fulfill the mandate. However, a few new topics would need to be added to ensure that all required elements are included in the course.

So, what is changing? First, this year's (FY10) course will contain a copy of the USDA's Rules of Behavior (ROB) and a verification of acceptance statement. Additionally, the FY10 ISA course will also include new materials covering security incidents. Finally, for the first time the ISA Planning Team took advantage of AgLearn's ability to provide item level analysis on exams. Through this analysis and its results, the ISA Planning Team was able to identify several questions from last year's exam that were not clearly written and in some cases confused many users. This allowed the ISA Planning Team to make needed changes to the exam to ensure a higher probability for a passing grade the first time through. As a result, some questions were edited for clarity or dropped altogether.

Based on these decisions, the ISA Planning Team and the AgLearn Program believe that the FY10 USDA ISA and ROB mandatory training will be the most successful yet and we are looking forward to delivering this rewarding experience to all USDA agencies and offices.

Q: Why hasn't the video that I watched from Books24x7 site appeared in my Learning History?

A: In order to get credit for reading a book, viewing a video, etc. from Books24x7, you need to launch it from an item that is on your learning plan or in the AgLearn catalog. If a user accesses something using the Books24x7 Referenceware link, then they will not get credit since that link brings the user to the Books24x7 website with no items associated to it. A user can search for Leadership Development Channel (LDC) items or online items by Browsing the Catalog and selecting a subcategory under the LDC Subject Area or, if they know the title, using the Simple or Advanced Catalog Search features. Once they find the item they are looking for, the user can launch it or add it to their learning plan. To search for videos using Simple Catalog Search: type video in keyword field and select the online option. To find Books24x7 videos with the Advance Catalog Search: select "Only Items" under Search for; select "Video" under Delivery Method; and select "SkillSoft" under Source.

Q: I provide AgLearn administer support to my local field office and noticed that some of the information on my employee's learning history is inaccurate, does AgLearn ever review and cleanup?

A: Use the Learning Event Editor to edit a user's Learning History. This tool allows to you delete items from their Learning History as well. The Learning Event Editor is located in User Management under Tools > Learning Event Editor.

It is up to you and your agency if and how you want to review user records and also your policy of "cleaning up" their records. One commonly used method is having users monitor their learning history and to report errors, such a duplicates, to their supervisor and/or admin point of contact to request a correction.

Q: What exactly do the various definitions for "hours" really mean in AgLearn?

A: The first thing to note about hours is the placement of the fields on the Item tabs. Three of the hour definitions are found on the Design tab (Credit Hours, Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Hours and Contact Hours) and two are found on the delivery tab. Some terms are more commonly used in classroom-based items, others more commonly used in web-based items.

Credit Hours (Design tab) - PLATEAU: The number of credit hours allotted for this item and awarded to a user once the item is completed.

Additional: The number of professional accreditation units that are typically noted on a course certificate. Example: Continuing Education Unit (CEU) (ie, 10 hours =1 CEU) and academic hours paid for by the learner.

CPE Hours (Design tab) - PLATEAU: The Credit for Professional Education for the Item.

Contact Hours (Design tab) - PLATEAU: The number of hours of instruction for the item.

Additional: The total number of hours that the teacher or trainer is physically in the presence of the learner. Example: A class begins at 9:00 AM and the instructor breaks at 10:30 for a half hour. The class resumes at 11:00, then breaks for an hour lunch at 12:30. The class resumes at 1:30 and ends at 3:00. While the Length (see definition below) of the class would be six hours, the contact hours would equal 4.5. This field is generally used only for synchronous (live) items such as classroom, conference, virtual classroom, and webinars.

Length (Delivery tab) - PLATEAU: The number of total hours that the item requires for scheduling purposes and during which required resources are committed. For example, if the item is delivered in 5 days in the classroom that each begin at 8 and end at 5 with an hour for lunch, the length would be 45 hours because you would commit resources for the lunch hour as well.

Additional: Length refers to the entire item, whereas Duration refers to each segment (see below).

Duration (Delivery tab) - PLATEAU: the number of hours the segment lasts for each day.

Additional: A one day classroom item might have a length of 8 hours (see definition of Length), but a morning segment scheduled in a lab may have a duration of 4 hours and an afternoon segment scheduled for an auditorium (with different resources) has a duration of 3 hours. The length of the 8 hour day includes lunch. For web based courses, Duration is equal to seat time, the estimated number of hours a learner would sit in front of a computer to finish the entire course.

## **AgLearn Advises China National School of Administration page 7**

The AgLearn PMO hosted a briefing to provide E-learning insights and best practices for a delegation from the China National School of Administration (CNSA) and the World Bank Institute (WBI). At the request of E-Learning officials from the World Bank, Mr. Stan Gray (USDA Director of E-Learning), Mr. Dwayne Cotti (AgLearn Program Manager), and Ms. Kathy Fallow (AgLearn Senior Training Analyst) provided an in-depth analysis of the operations and effectiveness/benefits of a department wide, online, learning management system (AgLearn) to an assembly of educational leaders from the WBI and CNSA . The delegation from the CNSA included Bangyu Yuan (Director-General of Information Technology), Manchuan Wang (Professor of the Public Administration), Yuanyuan Deng (Deputy Division Chief of Information Technology), Guanghua Huang (Deputy Division Chief of Information Technology).

The CNSA is located in Beijing, PRC and is a state-of-the-art training center for middle and senior civil servants, senior executives and policy research fellows, which provides policy consultancy to government management and develops theoretical research in the field of public management. Members from the WBI included Sheila Jagannathan (Senior Learning Specialist), Mei Xie (Senior Water Resource Specialist), Jiping Zhang (Consultant), Bintao Wang (Consultant).

Additionally, a reporter for Government Executive Magazine, Alyssa Rosenberg, was in attendance and has posted an article on the Government Executive webpage, located at:

[http://www.govexec.com/story\\_page.cfm?filepath=/dailyfed/0909/091109ar1.htm&oref=search](http://www.govexec.com/story_page.cfm?filepath=/dailyfed/0909/091109ar1.htm&oref=search)

## **Are You Making Every Penny Count?**

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Wouldn't it be great to develop your own financial plan with the help of a certified financial planner at no cost to you? Now you can! AgLearn now features the complete Dmason financial and retirement planning courses designed specifically for Federal employees. In addition to learning how to develop your own plan, you'll learn:

How to choose investments for your TSP and other savings

Which types of investments to use for short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals

How different tax-saving accounts (e.g., TSP, IRAs, EE, I bonds) can help your savings grow

Whether you have just started your career or have years of experience behind you, it's never too late to start investing for your lifelong income. These same courses have been offered through the USDA Graduate School for over \$200. Through AgLearn, it won't cost you a penny since your agency has prepaid for your license.

You will develop your own personal financial plan during this course!

*The AgLearn program is managed by USDA's E-Training Director under OCIO.*

Phone: 202-694-5985 E-mail: [TeamAgLearn@ocio.usda.gov](mailto:TeamAgLearn@ocio.usda.gov)