



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Human Capital Leadership
and Merit System
Accountability Division

Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [Name of appellant]

Agency classification: Human Resources Assistant
GS-203-7

Organization: [Appellant's organization/location]
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

OPM decision: Human Resources Assistant
GS-203-7

OPM decision number: C-0203-07-04

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

Robert D. Hendler
Classification and Pay Claims
Program Manager
Center for Merit System Accountability

September 22, 2006

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, this decision constitutes a certificate that is mandatory and binding on all administrative, certifying, payroll, disbursing, and accounting officials of the Government. The agency is responsible for reviewing its classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with this decision. There is no right of further appeal. This decision is subject to discretionary review only under conditions and time limits specified in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, appendix 4, section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

Decision sent to:

[Appellant's address]

[Appellant's servicing human resources office]

[Appellant's regional human resources office]

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Introduction

On April 27, 2006, the San Francisco Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [name of appellant]. On July 12, 2006, we received the agency's complete administrative report. The appellant's position is classified as Human Resources Assistant, GS-203-7, but she believes it should be reclassified as Human Resources Specialist (Benefits), GS-201-9. The appellant's official duty station and primary work site is [appellant's organization/location], U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant makes various statements about the classification review process conducted by her agency. In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing her current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison. Because our decision sets aside all previous agency decisions, the classification practices used by the appellant's agency in classifying her position are not germane to the classification appeal process.

The appellant mentions her personal qualifications, including other human resources duties and responsibilities she has learned and accomplished in her current position. Personal qualifications are considered in classifying positions to the extent they are required to perform current duties and responsibilities of an employee's position. To the extent that they are needed for this purpose, we have carefully considered them along with all other information furnished by the appellant and her agency.

Position information

Both the appellant and her supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's official position description (PD) [number]. She performs a variety of duties in employee benefits, staffing of temporary positions, payroll transactions, and providing assistance on various automated systems used for human resources (HR) actions, payroll, and timekeeping. These duties are in support of and augment the work of six HR specialists in the [name of appellant's work unit]. The team services three forests in the province.

The appellant spends approximately 55 percent of her time providing guidance to employees and their families on a variety of employee benefits including retirement, health and life insurance, financial re-deposits, leave, and survivor benefits. She determines if retirement applications are complete, and generates annuity estimates. She also distributes health benefits information during Open Season, and presents employee benefits training to employees.

The appellant spends up to 30 percent of her time staffing temporary positions for three national forests, [names of national forests]. Upon receiving requests for recruitment to fill

temporary job vacancies under 5 CFR part 316 appointment authority, she exercises her delegated examining authority by preparing and issuing vacancy announcements for the job openings, including uploading vacancy announcements onto OPM's Web site USAJOBS to provide the required public access to the information. After the vacancy announcement closes, the appellant screens the applications received against OPM's Qualification Requirements; rates and ranks applicants using automated crediting plans in the AVUE Digital Services system, adjudicates any veteran's preference claims among the applicants; issues certificates of eligibles created by AVUE to selecting officials; processes any objections to candidates from the selecting officials based on qualifications or suitability (including referral to OPM to adjudicate any objections required by regulations); audits certificates of eligibles returned by selecting officials to ensure selections were made in accordance with the "Rule of 3" and veterans' preference; and issues notices to applicants regarding the outcome of their submitted applications.

The appellant spends approximately 10 percent of her time in pay administration duties. She responds to problems on various employee pay issues; researches problems and reconstructs transactions; takes corrective action; and provides information to both employees and supervisors. The appellant receives error reports generated by the National Finance Center (NFC); researches records to ensure that the discrepancies reported are valid; requests manual adjustments and other computer input to correct problems of overpayments, underpayments, missed deductions or withholdings, etc. She submits requests to the NFC for bill collection when appropriate, and receives and makes recommendations on payment waivers requested by employees. The appellant provides information and guidance on the appropriateness and coding of premium pay, as well as providing assistance in resolving processing errors involving actual payments. She provides training on timesheets and pay laws to the Business Management Assistants at the three Forests previously noted.

The appellant spends up to 5 percent of her time downloading the latest updates, troubleshooting, and providing assistance on various automated systems. She provides technical guidance and direction in the daily operation and maintenance of the HR data system. The appellant provides advice and counsel to the HR staff on data processing capabilities, and imports HR data from central systems into local databases in order to perform analyses and prepare management reports. The appellant indicates that some of these reports are used at the agency's national level, e.g., Cost of Government Report. She also provides training to employees on the use of various automated systems to access individual employee benefits information.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official PD which we find is sufficient for purposes of classification, and incorporate it by reference into this decision. In addition, to help decide the appeal we conducted separate telephone interviews with the appellant and her supervisor.

Series, title, and standard determination

The appellant disagrees with the agency's assignment of her position to the Human Resources Assistance Series, GS-203. That series covers one-grade interval administrative support positions that supervise, lead, or perform HR assistance work. The work requires

substantial knowledge of civilian and/or military HR terminology, requirements, procedures, operations, functions and regulatory policy, and procedural requirements applicable to HR transactions. It does not require a broad knowledge of Federal HR systems or a depth of knowledge in HR concepts, principles, and techniques. HR assistants provide support for HR specialists in using information systems and in delivering services in the various specialty areas of HR. They process and document HR actions for a wide variety of employee categories that involve different forms, authorities, action codes, regulatory authorities, or pay systems.

The appellant believes her work warrants classification to the Human Resources Management Series, GS-201. That series covers two-grade interval administrative positions that manage, supervise, administer, advise on, or deliver HR management products or services. Since some tasks are common to both administrative and support occupations, it is not always easy to distinguish between assistants classified in one-grade interval administrative support occupations and specialists classified in two-grade interval administrative occupations. Both the Job Family Standards (JFS) covering the GS-201 and GS-203 series discuss how to distinguish between specialist and assistant work. Guidance on distinguishing between administrative and support work is also contained in *The Classifier's Handbook*.

Support work usually involves proficiency in one or more functional areas or in certain limited phases of a specified program. Normally, a support position can be identified with the mission of a particular organization or program. The work usually does not require knowledge of interrelationships among functional areas or organizations. Employees performing support work follow established methods and procedures. Specifically, HR assistants have boundaries that narrowly restrict their work. They use a limited variety of techniques, standards, or regulations. The problems HR assistants deal with are recurring and have precedents. These limitations impact the breadth and depth of knowledge required, the complexity of problem solving, the applicability of guidelines, and the closeness of supervisory controls.

On the other hand, administrative work primarily requires a high order of analytical ability combined with a comprehensive knowledge of (1) the functions, processes, theories and principles of management, and (2) the methods used to gather, analyze, and evaluate information. Administrative work also requires skill in applying problem solving techniques and skill in communicating both orally and in writing. Administrative positions do not require specialized education, but they do involve the types of skills typically gained through college level education or through progressively responsible experience. In particular, full-performance HR specialists use broad HR management knowledge, concepts, and principles to perform a wide variety of work in one or more HR specialty areas. In addition, HR specialist positions at the lower levels of the career ladder (i.e., GS-5/7) perform developmental assignments geared to providing the necessary basic HR training to progress to the full performance level.

To decide the proper series for the appellant's position, we examined the characteristics and requirements of the work, as well as management's intent in establishing the position. Typical of support work in her functional areas, the appellant is chiefly responsible for (1) explaining benefits (including retirement) to employees to enable them to make decisions

appropriate for their own personal circumstances; (2) coordinating the recruitment of temporary and seasonal employees following established methods and procedures; and (3) reconstructing and correcting pay problems. The work affects the timeliness and adequacy of temporary hiring, as well as the quality, timeliness, and adequacy of employees' use of various benefits programs. The appellant is recognized as an expert source of information on benefits and pay, and independently performs her work. However, when she needs assistance, she consults with the appropriate HR specialist. Given that the appellant is assigned to the [name of appellant's work team] and spends the majority of her time advising employees on their benefits, as well as performing a variety of related procedural tasks, the record shows it is management's intent to establish a support position to handle such matters. This allows HR specialists in the office to perform substantive work in their respective HR fields (e.g., employee relations, classification/staffing) requiring the application of broad HR knowledge, concepts, and principles.

The appellant performs her benefits-related duties based primarily on her knowledge of the organization's missions, goals and functions in combination with a practical knowledge of the requirements of employee benefits. As the primary benefits counselor, she refers to applicable laws and regulations, OPM handbooks and guides, and agency-specific procedures, to advise employees, annuitants, and family members on a wide range of benefits-related matters. However, in contrast to administrative occupations, the appellant's benefits work does not require applying a high level of analysis or judgment to make the information gathered fit a particular situation. Due to the nature of the work, the appellant cannot make decisions based on her research; she is limited to sharing this information with her clients to assist them in making an informed choice.

Similar to her work in benefits, in performing her staffing functions for hiring temporary employees, she applies a practical knowledge of staffing methods and procedures rather than the broader and more extensive knowledge of staffing principles and examination typical of HR specialists. Like HR assistant work in staffing positions, she refers to specific laws and agency rules and regulations which do not require a high level of analysis and judgment to determine the appropriate process, procedure, and applicant eligibility, and utilizes the straight forward AVUE automated examining system under the agency's demonstration project to rate and rank candidates and issue certificates. In contrast to HR specialists, the bulk of the temporary positions she staffs are common, lower-graded, non-complex General Schedule (GS) positions or Federal Wage System (FWS) jobs (e.g., Forestry Technician, GS-462-4/5, Biological Science Technician, GS-404-3/7, Laborer, 3502-3/4, Engineering Equipment Operator, 5716-8, Motor Vehicle Operator, 5703-5) which are filled on a cyclical basis each year to perform essentially the same duties. In doing so, she uses a limited variety of staffing techniques, standards, and regulations, and deals with recurring problems where precedents for resolution are readily available. In those instances where she staffs higher graded temporary positions (e.g., Botanist, GS-430-9, Wildlife Biologist, GS-486-9) similar limited staffing techniques, standards, and examining processes and tools (AVUE) are utilized.

Unlike HR specialist positions at lower levels, the appellant is not in a developmental position. Her position does not encompass the development of the full range of HR specialist skills at various grade levels (e.g., analysis, research, writing, and judgment) over time, leading to a full performance level administrative position within a designated career ladder.

She is currently at the full operating level (GS-7) performing the full scope of assistant assignments typical of that level, with no further non-competitive promotion potential.

For the preceding reasons, the appellant's position is properly classified in the GS-203 series. Because the appellant performs work in two specialized HR functions (i.e., employee benefits/ recruitment and placement) but none predominates, the proper title is Human Resources Assistant. Positions in the GS-203 series are evaluated by application of the grading criteria in the Job Family Position Classification Standard (JFS) for Assistance Work in the Human Resources Management Group, GS-0200.

Grade determination

The GS-0200 JFS is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor-level in a standard describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor-level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Each factor level has a corresponding point value. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the JFS.

In her appeal, the appellant does not disagree with her agency's assignment of the levels for the nine FES factors covering her position. After careful review, we concur with her agency's assignment of the nine factor levels for her position which are summarized below.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge Required by the Position	1-5	750
2. Supervisory Controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and Effect	5-3	150
6.&7. Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts	2-b	75
8. Physical Demands	8-1	5
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total</i>		1535

A total of 1535 points falls within the GS-7 range (1355-1600 points) on the grade conversion table in the JFS. Therefore, the appellant's position is graded at the GS-7 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Human Resources Assistant, GS-203-7.