

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

**Appellants:** [appellant]

**Agency classification:** Computer Assistant  
GS-335-7

**Organization:** Customer Support Branch  
Information Management Division  
[name] Army Community Hospital  
U.S. Army Medical Department Activity  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Computer Assistant  
GS-335-7

**OPM decision number:** C-0335-07-09

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

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

6/16/2008

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Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 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 name and address]

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## Introduction

On November 29, 2007, the Dallas Oversight and Accountability Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [appellant's name], forwarded through the [name] Civilian Personnel Advisory Center. The appellant is assigned to a position currently classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7, for the Customer Support Branch, Information Management Division, of the [name] Army Community Hospital, a U.S. Army Medical Department Activity located at [installation name]. She believes her position should be classified as Composite Health Care System (CHCS) Administrator, GS-303-9. We received the complete administrative report from the agency on February 15, 2008. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## Background and general issues

The appellant indicates she was hired for the position of CHCS Trainer, a position classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7, and assigned to the Information Management Division (IMD). She requested a review of her position description (PD) shortly after assignment to IMD because she stated that some of the duties of her former position as Health System Assistant, GS-303-6, in the Clinical Support Division were carried over to the new position in IMD. The agency made pen and ink changes to her PD in November 2001. **These changes included** language limiting software programs to CHCS programs; added the duties of developing ad hoc routines for database reports and managing CHCS user accounts; and updated the title of the organization. The appellant requested an audit in August 2002 but indicated she received no response.

The appellant was assigned to a second PD, classified June 28, 2007, based on management's submission of additional duties and a second revision to update language in the factor-level descriptions. The duties in this new position were also classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7. The appellant indicates these new duties are responsibilities that belong in other Divisions. She believes these duties should be removed, and she should not be required to do this work without an increase in pay or change of position name. She states she has become the System Administrator, not the CHCS Trainer for which she was hired.

The appellant takes issue with how her agency has decided to structure and assign work within the organization to which she is assigned. However, agency management has the right to determine the proper organizational structure and staffing requirements for the organization to best accomplish its assigned mission (5 U.S.C. 7106). The agency's decisions to establish the appellant's position and place it in IMD, including duties she previously performed in another division, is not subject to review under OPM's classification appeal process.

A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by an official with the authority to assign work. A position represents the duties and responsibilities which make up the work performed by an employee. Position classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the actual duties and responsibilities assigned by management and performed by the employee. An OPM appeal decision grades a real operating position, not simply the PD. Therefore, this decision is based on the actual work assigned to and performed by the appellant.

**Position information**

The IMD is responsible for providing Information Technology (IT) support and customer support to enhance and increase access to patient care at the medical facility. The Customer Support is one of four sub-units; the others are System Administration, Information Assurance, and CHCS/CHCS II Contractor Support, which provides CHCS II training and performs system upgrades and back-ups. Customer Support includes approximately nine positions: one IT Specialist, GS-2210-9; four Computer Assistants, GS-335-7, and one GS-335-6; plus a Supply Technician, GS-2005-5, a Work Order Technician, GS-303-5, and a Materials Handler, WG-6907-6. The Branch is headed by an IT Specialist, GS-2210-12, who serves as the appellant's supervisor.

The appellant works with the CHCS, a relational database system which is used by all military health care centers located both in and outside the United States. It is a module-based system with modules for radiology; laboratory; pharmacy; patient appointments and scheduling; managed care; patient administration; medical records tracking; medical service accounting; dietetics; clinical nursing, physician, and allied health; medical coding of outpatient visits; and other areas served by the medical and dental activities in the [installation] area. The CHCS provides for security by only assigning user access to the minimum data required to perform the duties of the position, e.g., scheduling clerks, accounting office, pharmacy, nursing services, etc. will differ in the menus available. This system is currently being linked to the CHCS II, also known as Armed Forces Health Longitudinal Technology Application (AHLTA) which is the military electronic health record. This system can provide access to military health records world-wide.

The appellant's primary duties based on estimated time includes a long list of tasks under the heading of Maintain Individual Provider Profiles in the CHCS and duties which involve training for individual system users. The PD, certified as accurate by the first- and second-level supervisors, indicates approximately 50 percent of her time is spent on the provider profile category, 25 percent on training users, and 10 on percent developing ad hoc report queries, with the remaining time spent on managing user accounts and recommending changes to resolve problems and improve service. The appellant believes she spends more time on training, approximately 35 percent; 10 to 15 percent on managing user accounts; and 15 percent on ad hoc reports, with the remainder involved in maintaining profiles and resolving system problems.

Detailed information must be entered into the system for medical care providers as to specific areas of practice, assigned clinics, license or Drug Enforcement Administration numbers, etc. Similar information is required for patients, military sponsors, and eligible dependents. As these areas are linked for appointment scheduling, accounting, record tracking, etc., input errors can cause problems which the appellant assists in resolving, e.g., duplicate patients, incorrect military sponsor, eligibility questions, etc. The appellant is responsible for the monthly Data Quality Management Control Review List – Internal Audit; Monthly Outpatient Records Reconciliation; and serves as CHCS functional lead on a process improvement team for Monthly Medical Expense and Performance Reporting System/Expense Assignment System Reconciliation based on her knowledge of the CHCS.

The appellant also provides training to new users of the system. This includes clerical support staff in the various medical clinics, and laboratory, radiology, pharmacy units, as well as the medical care providers who use and provide information into the system. Training may be provided on a one-to-one basis or in small groups for individuals using the same menu-groupings. The Army provides basic training modules and the facility has an eight-student room set up with terminals for training use. The appellant indicates a new user to the system requires approximately three hours of training.

The appellant is asked to develop ad-hoc reports to provide more specific information needed by management than those included in the established system of queries within the CHCS system. She manages CHCS and CHCS II user accounts, including requests for access privileges. She determines the appropriate menu areas according to the position held, assigns user names, passwords, security agreements, etc., and assists these users with problems using the system.

The appellant's PD and other materials of record furnish much more information about the duties and responsibilities and how they are performed. The PD is adequate for classification purposes, and we incorporate it by reference into this decision. To help decide this appeal, we conducted a telephone audit with the appellant on April 17, 2008, and a telephone interview with the immediate supervisor on May 1, 2008. In reaching our decision, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as the written information furnished by the appellant and the agency.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The agency assigned the appellant's position to the GS-335, Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, titled it Computer Assistant, and used the GS-335 position classification standard (PCS) to determine the grade level. The appellant believes her position should be classified as CHCS Administrator, GS-303-9.

The GS-303 Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series covers positions where duties are to perform or supervise clerical, assistant, or technician work for which no other series is appropriate. Positions in this series involve *specialized* work for which no appropriate occupational series has been established.

The GS-335 series covers positions involving performance or supervision of data processing support and services for users of digital computer systems including work such as (1) receiving, maintaining, and issuing data storage media for computer operations; (2) collecting and sequentially stating input media with instructions for processing; (3) scheduling use of computer time for program processing; (4) collecting, maintaining, and distributing program and systems documentation; and (5) collecting raw information, preparing flow charts, and coding in program languages; or (6) other support functions. This work requires knowledge of external data processing sequences, controls, procedures, or user and programming languages rather than in-depth knowledge of computer requirements or techniques associated with development and design of data processing systems. These support functions are further described in the Job Family Standard for Administrative Work in the Information Technology (IT) Group, GS-2200. It includes a discussion on distinguishing between specialist work and assistant work, which does

not require the regular and recurring application of knowledge of IT principles, concepts, and methods. It describes such duties as monitoring the operation of small networked systems, adding network users, updating passwords, installing or assisting users in installing off-the-shelf software programs, configuring hardware and software according to instructions, running scheduled backups, troubleshooting minor problems, and responding to less complex user questions. We find the appellant's work appropriately covered by the GS-335 series, a specific series which describes the work she performs and, therefore, is excluded from the GS-303 series, as defined.

### **Grade determination**

The GS-335 PCS uses the Factor Evaluation System format, under which factor levels and accompanying point values are assigned for each of the nine factors with the total then being converted to a grade level by use of the grade-conversion table provided in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor levels. For a position to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor-level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor-level description, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect that meets a higher level. The total is converted to a grade level by use of the grade-conversion table in the standard.

#### *Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position*

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that employees must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge.

At Level 1-5, employees carry out limited specialized projects and assignments using knowledge of fundamental data processing methods, practices, and techniques in work involving the development, test, implementation, and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. Additionally, employees use knowledge of the data content and output options for a variety of administrative, scientific, and/or technical program applications which are processed on any of several multi-program operating systems. Employees use the knowledge at this level as the basis for analysis and decision-making in several functional settings.

In addition to the knowledge previously described, Level 1-6 requires extensive knowledge of at least one multi and typically several single processor computer systems. Employees monitor processing work flow and diagnose and resolve error and problem conditions involving program interrelationships and interlocking computer systems. The work involves many of the problem-solving aspects of computer specialist work except those requiring programming corrections or equipment repair. It requires extensive knowledge of computer equipment, internal computer processes, applications and utility programs, and magnetic media. It also requires a wide range of analytical and diagnostic methods, procedures, and principles. Work at this level commonly involves taking action to order and interpret system dumps, order and implement back-up recovery procedures, reallocating equipment usage to work around equipment malfunctions and similar actions.

Comparable to Level 1-5, the appellant must have knowledge of the CHCS and the input/output characteristics of the different modules and menus to instruct students in the basic principles, procedures, operations, and specialized techniques of CHCS. She must have instructional skills sufficient to direct students both in a classroom setting and one-on-one, using lectures, discussions, demonstrations, practices, evaluations and progressions, information sheets, news releases, and updates on system operations. She must have skill in use of computer software to include Windows, Web browsers, and all user functions in CHCS and AHLTA (CHCS II); local area network use, and of loading/configuration of software and set up of microcomputers for CHCS use.

As previously discussed, the appellant uses her knowledge of the various modules and menus of CHCS to instruct new users and to resolve problems with interrelationship of the various aspects of CHCS. Problems include eligibility questions, provider profile not complete, the military sponsor incorrectly entered, etc. Like Level 1-5, she uses her knowledge of the structure of the CHCS and individual modules to develop ad hoc queries to obtain information requested by management (e.g., number of pregnant females on active duty). She must determine the appropriate modules and the fields of those modules to query to obtain the requested information. The appellant serves on facility functional teams to improve data reporting and quality assurance processes as the CHCS functional lead.

The appellant's work does not meet Level 1-6. Her duties mainly involve training new users, resolving user questions and problems, and maintaining the quality of the data in the CHCS. These duties do not require the extensive knowledge of computer equipment, internal computer processes, and applications and utility programs; or the elements of programming, systems analysis, and equipment operations contemplated at Level 1-6.

Level 1-5 is credited for 750 points.

### *Factor 2, Supervisory Controls*

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct and indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the degree to which work is reviewed by the supervisor.

At Level 2-3, which is the highest level described in the PCS, the supervisor provides direction on objectives and priorities for new work, deadlines, and deadline changes for new and established work. The employee identifies the work to be done, plans and carries out the steps required, and submits completed work to users without supervisory review. The employee independently deviates from instructions to provide for lower or higher priorities and other changes based on past experience and flexibility within processing specification. The employee commonly adapts or develops new work procedures and instructions for application by self and others, but he or she will seek supervisory assistance and discuss work problems such as when processing requests appear to exceed system capacity or could have an adverse effect on other processing requirements. Completed work is reviewed for conformity to deadlines and accepted practices on the basis of responses from technical and functional users regarding the quality and



accuracy of work products. Work methods are not normally reviewed unless a recurring common pattern of problems develops.

The appellant's supervisory controls meet but do not exceed Level 2-3. Comparable to this level, the appellant is responsible for determining the approaches to be taken and the methodology to be used in accomplishing assignments such as resolving errors in provider profiles, duplicating patient records, and providing support to avoid problems in patients obtaining medical care. Based on the appellant's experience with the CHCS, the supervisor provides minimal technical supervision, allowing the appellant latitude to independently plan and carry out her assignments; interpret policies, procedures, and practices based on established objectives; and resolve the majority of conflicts that arise. Her training duties are dependent on the numbers of newly hired clerks and providers who need to learn CHCS. Her other work assignments are derived through problems arising in the use of the system, e.g., outside providers not entered correctly, family information incorrect, etc. The appellant uses initiative in carrying out recurring assignments independently without specific instructions; however, unusual, sensitive, or potentially controversial situations are referred to the supervisor, e.g., supervisors requesting access to additional menu areas for employees beyond what is normally allowed within the system's instructions. Problems with software errors or equipment are referred to the local systems staff or the Medical Health System (MHS) Helpdesk located at Fort Sam Houston. Similar to Level 2-3, the supervisor may work with the appellant in developing difficult ad hoc queries of the system for specific information reports and reviews the completed work in terms of adequacy.

Level 2-3 is credited for 275 points.

### *Factor 3, Guidelines*

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them.

At Level 3-2, guidelines are in the form of terminal and other equipment manuals, program run book, flow charts, master schedules, and others that are detailed as to what is to be done. Selection of appropriate guideline is usually clear. However, guidelines may provide for judgmental deviations in the work, such as alternative methods for coding, applying system control language, or performing a retrieval through a terminal. Digression from guidelines which has not been established by experience and precedent action is referred to the supervisor.

Level 3-3, the highest level described in the PCS, includes working with new requirements or new applications for which only general guidelines are available. The employee uses judgment in adjusting the most appropriate guidelines to fit new processing requirements or develop new methods for accomplishing the work. Guidelines may require modification to provide for adding new forms of input, allowing for flexible as opposed to fixed scheduling, adjusting to new or conflicting requirements, or adapting to a new hardware or software capability.

Like Level 3-2, the appellant's guidelines include CHCS specifications, system operating characteristics and procedures, Army data processing standards, mini and microcomputer hardware and operating systems manuals and documentation, database management manuals and

documentation, and software application manuals. Like at Level 3-2, she must exercise judgment to select the appropriate guidelines depending on the phase of her work and the product requested. In addition, Army regulations and those of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations standards must be followed. She must use judgment in selecting among authorized methods, techniques, and training aids. The supervisor is consulted when appropriate guidelines are not apparent or adaptations may create problems.

The appellant's guidelines do not meet Level 3-3. The CHCS is well-documented. It has been in place for approximately 10 years and is used throughout the military services. Her work does not involve new processing requirements or developing new methods to accomplish work as described at Level 3-3. Guidelines are available in printed manuals and on-line through the MHS help desk to obtain answers to problems and questions. While the appellant must use judgment to select appropriate guidance, as in Level 3-2, the available guidance is more specific than the general guidance typical at Level 3-3, and according to the supervisor, will answer most questions raised by the users of the system.

Level 3-2 is credited for 125 points.

#### *Factor 4, Complexity*

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

At Level 4-3, the employee performs a variety of tasks involving discrete methods and procedures, or a variety of related tasks requiring a sequence of actions involving differing methods and procedures. The decision regarding what is to be done results from studying each assignment or processing problem situation. Actions to be taken differ according to the equipment or program system appropriate to the request.

The highest level described in the PCS is Level 4-4, which is distinguished from Level 4-3 by (1) the variety and complexity of operating systems monitored, (2) the nature and variety of problems encountered and resolved, *and* (3) the nature of independent decisions made by the employee. Employees at this level perform problem-solving duties involving a wide range of problem or error conditions in equipment, program data, and processing methods and procedures. This diagnosis and resolution of problems involves equipment configurations with different operating characteristics, a variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods to arrive at solutions or develop new procedures. Decisions regarding what needs to be done include assessing unusual circumstances or conditions, developing variations in approach to fit the specific problems, or dealing with incomplete or conflicting data.

Comparable to Level 4-3, the appellant is responsible for training CHCS users on the modules and menus needed to perform their various work assignments. Basic training materials are provided on the system, but she uses judgment to tailor instruction for specific students to increase their understanding of their portion of the system and how to input and retrieve information. To perform her system/problem solving work, she must know the structure of the

databases, how they are linked, and the fields critical to that linkage. The appellant serves as the point of contact for users throughout the medical facility in resolving problems with the CHCS and its linkage to AHLTA.

The appellant's work does not meet the complexity typical of Level 4-4. The CHCS is the primary system the appellant is responsible for. It is one system, comprised of many modules. Problems arise when care providers have not been correctly entered or critical items pertaining to eligibility criteria and identification have not been correctly input, e.g., social security numbers, military sponsor numbers, etc., which can result in care being denied until the problems are corrected. The appellant's resolution of problems does not involve different equipment configurations, the wide variety of data and programs, and many different processes and methods described at Level 4-4.

Level 4-3 is met, and 150 points are credited.

#### *Factor 5, Scope and Effect*

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work (e.g., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment) and the effect of work products or services both within and outside the organization.

Level 5-3, which is the highest level described in the PCS, is distinguished from Level 5-2 by the addition of requirements for solving problems and answering technical questions about control, scheduling, and/or direct support functions. The problems and error conditions encountered are conventional to data processing although solutions are not always covered by established or standardized procedures. Work results affect the efficiency of processing services, adequacy of products used in subsequent activities, and processing procedures and methods.

The appellant's work meets but does not exceed Level 5-3. Similar to Level 5-3, her duties involve resolving a range of problems in accordance with established criteria, answering technical questions, providing system access, and providing instruction for users of the system. This system affects access to patient care and scheduling at the facility as well as provides data for various management reports.

Level 5-3 is credited for 150 points.

#### *Factor 6, Personal Contacts*

This factor considers face-to-face and telephone contacts with people not in the supervisory chain.

The appellants' contacts meet but do not exceed Level 6-2, which is the highest level described in the PCS. Like at Level 6-2, primary contacts are with hospital staff, including physicians, nurses, administrative clerks, and other workers at local and higher levels of the agency. She has contact with computer specialists and others in the immediate organization including a number

of contractors and vendor representatives, as well as specialists at the MHS Helpdesk. These contacts are structured and routine.

Level 6-2 is credited for 25 points.

*Factor 7, Purpose of Personal Contacts*

The purpose of contacts ranges from factual exchanges of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing viewpoints, goals, or objectives. Personal contacts serving as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts serving as the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 7-2, which is the highest level described in the PCS. As at Level 7-2, the appellant's contacts are for the purpose of exchanging and providing factual information, coordinating work, explaining options, clarifying instructions, resolving software problems, and providing training to new users.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

*Factor 8, Physical Demands*

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignments.

The appellant's position meets Level 8-2, where work requires extended periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending, stooping, or carrying equipment weighing as much as 45 pounds. There is moderate walking between locations to provide automation instruction and she may be required to carry boxes of computer paper, supplies, and pieces of equipment weighing up to 45 pounds. Because of staff shortages, the appellant may be required to work at a rapid pace for extended periods of time to resolve problems with system information or eligibility issues which result in delays in patient care.

The appellant's position does not meet Level 8-3, since her work does not require the regular and recurring lifting and carrying of objects weighing over 50 pounds and occasional lifting and carrying of heavier objects expected at this level.

Level 8-2 is credited for 20 points.

*Factor 9, Work Environment*

This factor considers the risks and discomforts in the employee's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required.

Like Level 9-1, the appellant's work environment is comparable to that found in a typical office setting. She is required to work in the automation classroom and offices throughout the medical and dental activities and other subordinate and local units. Work is usually performed in an

office with adequate light, heat, and ventilation. In contrast to Level 9-2, her work environment does not involve the level of risk, taking special safety precautions, or requirement for special clothing or protective equipment as expected at this level.

Level 9-1 is credited for 5 points.

*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. Personal Contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of Personal Contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical Demands	8-2	20
9. Work Environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total</i>		1,550

A total of 1,550 points falls within the GS-7 range (1,355 to 1,600) on the grade conversion table in the standard.

**Decision**

The position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7.