

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness  
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs**

Chicago Oversight Division  
230 South Dearborn Street, Room 3060  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-1687

**Classification Appeal Decision  
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

**Appellants:** [appellant]

**Agency Classification:** Computer Specialist, GS-334-11

**Organization:** U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service  
Forest Products Laboratory  
Administration  
Management Systems Group  
[city, state]

**OPM decision:** **Computer Specialist  
GS-334-11**

**OPM decision number:** C-0334-11-04

Kathryn A. Rabelhofer for

\_\_\_\_\_  
Frederick J. Boland  
Classification Appeals Officer

November 13, 1998

\_\_\_\_\_  
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 name and address]]

[name and address of appellant's servicing personnel office]

Mr. Larry Wachs  
Acting Director, Office of Human Resources  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The appellant contests his agency's decision classifying his position as Computer Specialist, GS-334-11. The position (L-8067) is located in the Management Systems Group, Administration, Forest Products Laboratory, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, [city and state]. He believes his position description accurately lists his major duties, but feels his work warrants more credit under Factor 2 (Supervisory Controls) of the classification standard.

## **POSITION INFORMATION**

The appellant is one of about six employees within the Management Systems Group. The Group is led by a GS-13 Supervisory Computer Specialist and includes one GS-12 and three GS-11 Computer Specialists as well as a GS-5 Secretary.

The appellant's major duties include the management of the Local Area Network (LAN), personal computers, data telecommunications systems, Data General System and Gandalf Starmaster System. He serves as one of two LAN administrators and manages the Forest Product Laboratory's interface to the Forest Service's Wide Area Network (WAN). He is responsible for installing new software releases and updates for the LAN. He is responsible for system management of desktop and laptop computers and provides technical support to users who are not themselves Computer Specialists. The appellant maintains a working knowledge of all software programs available to user on the Data General and IBM systems. He also is responsible for formulating and recommending policies, plans and procedures relative to the effective acquisition and use of information systems technology and information management related issues.

## **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

### **Series and Title Determination**

The Computer Specialist, GS-334, series covers positions, like the appellant's, whose primary requirement is knowledge of information processing methodology and technology, computer capabilities, and processing techniques. The prescribed title for non-supervisory positions in this series is *Computer Specialist*.

### **Grade Determination**

The OPM *Computer Specialist, GS-334, Series* standard, dated July 1991, is in Factor Evaluation System (FES) format. This system requires that credit levels assigned under each factor relate to only one set of duties and responsibilities. Under FES, work must be fully equivalent to the factor-level described in the standard to warrant credit at that level's point value. If work is not fully equivalent to the overall intent of a particular level described in the standard, a lower level and point value must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect of the work that meets a higher level.

Work demanding less than a substantial (at least 25 percent) amount of time is not considered in classifying a position. Similarly, acting, temporary, and other responsibilities that are not regular and continuing are not considered in classifying positions. (Temporary assignments of sufficient duration, though, are sometimes recognized in accordance with agency discretion by temporary promotion if higher graded duties are involved, by formal detail, or by performance recognition.)

The appellant raises specific issues regarding one of the nine factors discussed in the standard. Accordingly, this decision details our analysis of the disputed factor (Factor 2) and one additional factor (Factor 3), which we found inaccurate. However, we independently reviewed the appellant's duties and responsibilities against the other, undisputed factors and concur with the agency's credit level assignments for them.

## **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 review of completed work. Controls are exercised by the supervisor in the way assignments are made, instructions are given to the employee, priorities and deadlines are set, and objectives and boundaries are defined. Responsibility of the employee depends upon the extent to which the employee is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work, to modify or recommend modification of instructions, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives. The degree of review of completed work depends upon the nature and extent of the review, e.g., close and detailed review of each phase of the assignment, detailed review of the finished assignment, spot-check of finished work for accuracy, or review only for adherence to policy.*

The appellant states:

In this case, my supervisor provides only administrative direction. I am responsible for managing my workload and projecting my future workload. I set my own priorities and goals. For example, one of my assignments is to provide telecommunication services for the Forest Products Laboratory (FPL), and to provide assistance in planning and implementing communication services for other USDA agencies within the metropolitan area. I am responsible for the planning, designing and management of our Local Area Network (LAN), and management of Wide Area Network (WAN) communications. It is my responsibility to determine the current and future telecommunication needs . . .

Determining the current and future telecommunication needs requires performing studies to continually evaluate our present configuration and project long term needs to fulfill our program objectives. These studies are initiated and performed without supervisory intervention. For example, I have identified the need for better performance in the server sub-net of our Local Area Network (LAN). I have evaluated possible solutions and have recommended what I feel is the best solution. My supervisor has taken this recommendation without change to top management in order to secure funding for this project. Another project I am involved in is the metropolitan network consolidation plan that is intended to combine external telecommunications services for all USDA agencies within the [city and state] area. I am working with other telecommunication specialists outside my organization, as a peer, to plan and implement a wide area network that will provide high speed connectivity while reducing costs for all organizations involved . . .

It is my responsibility to interpret and implement national policy decisions with regard to our LAN. In doing so, I must evaluate potential solutions that conform to the national policy while minimizing any negative impacts to our systems and users. Many of these decisions lead to the setting of program policy by top

management. For example, the national policy dictated that all Forest Service networks must be secured from external intrusion. I was required to analyze our current network security and provide the best solution to conform to the national policy. My solution mandated the construction of a secure network and an unsecured network. This in turn required a policy that specifies which type of network traffic will be allowed, what network protocols are used, and the placement of computer systems in each network. In determining the telecommunication needs of FPL, it was discovered that our users need remote access. This requires that I interpret USDA telecommunication policy and ensure that the system implemented at FPL is consistent with that policy. This also requires that I determine appropriate policies related to network protocol, network security, and user access. In each of these cases my recommendations were accepted without changes . . .

I am considered the technical authority for telecommunication services, Personal Computer (PC) hardware and software, and the Data General mainframe computer system. My supervisor not only accepts my recommendations without significant change, but also relies on my technical knowledge to maintain and advance our telecommunication services.

Level 2-5 reflects administrative supervision only, with full technical authority delegated to the specialist. Typically, this level of authority is accompanied by responsibility for a significant program or function. While the appellant has significant technical responsibility for a portion of the Forest Products Laboratory's computer program, his supervisor is ultimately responsible for administration of the program. Level 2-4 involves a high degree of independence and responsibility and thus fully recognizes the technical responsibility vested in the appellant's position.

As at Level 2-4, the appellant's supervisor sets the overall objectives. The appellant independently plans and carries out projects and analyses of the organization's requirements; interprets policies, procedures, and regulations in conformance with established mission objectives; integrates and coordinates the work of others as necessary; and resolves most conflicts that arise. He informs his supervisor about progress he is making and alerts him to potentially controversial matters or far-reaching implications, as other Level 2-4 specialists do.

Unlike Level 2-5 specialists with significant program responsibility, the appellant does not merely receive assignments in terms of broadly defined missions or functions. He does not decide which analytical and technical decisions will form the basis for major program policy and operational decisions by top management, as such responsibility is already credited to higher level positions than his own.

We evaluate this factor at Level 2-4 and credit 450 points.

### **Factor 3: Guidelines**

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

In supporting the Forest Products Laboratory's computer needs, the appellant, like other specialists at Level 3-3, adapts an abundance of guides and precedents to the lab's individual needs. He must gather considerable information to supplement gaps or lack of specificity to particular problems he encounters in adapting hardware and software to the lab's computer environment. At Level 3-3, he is already credited with exercising experienced judgment when

relating existing hardware and software approaches to varying situations and determining the kind and amount of data needed for testing modifications to the LAN.

Unlike Level 3-4 specialists, most of his work requires adaptation of existing systems and precedents, rather than significant deviations from standard LAN designs, hardware, and software. He does not formulate criteria for other Computer Specialists to follow in their designs, as Level 3-4 specialists might, nor does he develop new and improved methods to cope with particular projects. His work assignments do not entail unprecedented design efforts, the integration of other experienced specialists' work as a team or project leader, or duties of a similar nature, such as forecasting future processing needs and environments so that seasoned Computer Specialists may study and adapt to their own organizations.

We evaluate this factor at Level 3-3 and credit 275 points.

### **FACTOR LEVEL POINT SUMMARY**

Factor	Level	Points
1	1-7	1250
2	2-4	450
3	3-3	275
4	4-4	225
5	5-3	150
6 & 7	3b	110
8	8-1	5
9	9-1	5
	Total:	2470

The table above summarizes our evaluation of the appellant's work. As shown on page 11 of the standard, a total of 2470 points falls within the GS-11 grade range (2355-2750).

### **Decision**

The proper classification of the appellant's position is Computer Specialist, GS-334-11.