



United States
**Office of
Personnel Management**

Washington, DC 20415

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

Appellant: [Name of appellant]

Agency classification: Human Resources Assistant
(Employee Benefits)
GS-203-8

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

OPM decision: Human Resources Assistant
(Employee Benefits)
GS-203-8

OPM decision number: C-0203-08-03

/s/ Robert D. Hendler

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

April 28, 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).

As indicated in this decision, our findings show that the appellant's official position description does not meet the standard of adequacy described in section III.E. of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*. Since position descriptions must meet the standard of adequacy, the agency must revise the appellant's position description to reflect our findings. The servicing human resources office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description within 30 days of the date of this decision to the San Francisco Field Services Group.

Decision sent to:

[Appellant's name and address]

[Address of appellant's servicing human resources office]

[Address of appellant's regional human resources office]

U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

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Introduction

On December 6, 2005, the San Francisco Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [name of appellant]. On January 24, 2006, we received the agency's complete administrative report. The appellant's position is classified as Human Resources Assistant (Employee Benefits), GS-203-8, but she believes that the complexity of her duties and responsibilities warrant upgrading to the GS-9 level. The appellant's official duty station and primary work site is the [appellant's organization/primary work location], U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Additionally, she works under a shared service agreement one day every two weeks at the [appellant's alternate work location]. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant does not believe that her current official position description (PD) [number] is completely accurate, but her immediate supervisor has certified to its accuracy. 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 is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by the employee. Classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the actual duties and responsibilities currently assigned by management and performed by the employee. An OPM appeal decision classifies a real operating position, and not simply the PD. This decision is based on the work currently assigned to and performed by the appellant.

Our review disclosed the appellant's PD describes duties which she does not perform. Specifically, under Factor 2, Supervisory Controls, although it accurately describes supervision over the appellant, it mentions staffing and employee relations duties (e.g., developing vacancy announcements and recommending disciplinary actions) which she does not perform. Factor 5, Scope and Effect, primarily describes duties unrelated to employee benefits (e.g., rating employees in lower graded jobs, applying appropriate classification standards) which she does not actually perform. Therefore, the appellant's PD of record does not meet the standard of adequacy addressed on pages 10-11 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, and the agency must amend the PD to reflect our findings.

The appellant makes various statements about the classification review process conducted by her agency, and compares her work to higher graded human resources positions in [appellant's region]. By law we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). In adjudicating this appeal, our only concern is to make our own independent decision on the proper classification of her position. Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others, which may or may not be classified correctly, as a basis for deciding her appeal. Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison. Because our decision sets aside any previous agency decision, the classification practices used by the appellant's agency in classifying her position are not germane to the classification appeal process.

The appellant's agency has primary responsibility for ensuring that its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant considers her position so similar to others that they all warrant the same classification, she may pursue the matter by writing to her agency's headquarters human resources office. In doing so, she should specify the precise organizational location/installation, classification, duties, and responsibilities of the positions in question. If the positions are found to be basically the same as hers, the agency must correct their classification to be consistent with this appeal decision. Otherwise, the agency should explain to her the differences between her position and the others.

The appellant mentions her personal qualifications, including other human resources duties and responsibilities she has learned and accomplished in different positions. 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

At the human resources office (HRO), the appellant spends up to 75 percent of her time providing technical assistance in the areas of employee benefits, injury and unemployment claims, and related personnel action processing. She is the primary benefits and retirement counselor, explaining and providing information to forest managers, supervisors, employees, former employees, survivors, and eligible family members on retirement options under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), both regular and offset; the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS); the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA); death benefits; Office of Workers' Compensation Program (OWCP) claims; disability claims; social security issues; health and life insurance options; and other current and emerging program provisions. Prior to reviewing, explaining, and advising employees and family members on retirement calculations, the appellant reviews the employee's official personnel folder (OPF) to ensure the correctness of the service computation date (SCD); to identify periods of part-time, intermittent, or military service; to ensure that the summary of work experience in a firefighter's PD reflects the types of duties and responsibilities required for firefighter special retirement coverage; and to locate and correct potential errors in retirement service designations through the Federal Erroneous Retirement Coverage Corrections Act (FERCCA) cases.

The appellant completes or assists employees and/or eligible family members in completing all necessary forms and paperwork needed to start, change, or cancel enrollment, or apply or file for employee benefits or a retirement annuity. The appellant ensures that all appropriate and necessary paperwork and/or correspondence is completed, coordinated, presented and/or forwarded, as necessary, to the appropriate office(s) such as the National Finance Center (NFC) (payroll), or other relevant offices. She also provides retirement and benefits information at employee orientations, briefings, and health benefits fairs and assists with training sessions presented to employees covering topics such as the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB), Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), Federal Employee Group Life Insurance programs (FEGLI), and other current and emerging provisions.

The appellant spends up to 20 percent of her time on injury, occupational illness or disease, and unemployment claims. This entails receiving, processing, submitting, and maintaining OWCP claims; advising employees, supervisors, and medical offices on filing injury claims; tracking long-term OWCP claimants; and working collaboratively with OWCP claim representatives and agency officials to return injured employees to work or, if warranted, to remove them from the employment rolls.

The appellant spends approximately 5 percent of her time performing other occasional duties such as organizing health benefits' fairs with vendors and carriers; participating in special projects (e.g., member of the Management Accident Review Board which meets quarterly); and serving as drug testing coordinator.

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including her official PD which, although not completely accurate, we have incorporated by reference into this decision. In addition, to help decide the appeal we conducted separate telephone interviews with the appellant, and her immediate supervisors at the [identities of appellant's primary and alternate work locations].

Series, title, and standard determination

The agency has classified the appellant's position in the Human Resources Assistance Series, GS-203, titling it "Human Resources Assistant (Employee Benefits)" and the appellant does not disagree. We concur with the agency's title and series determination. Positions classified in the GS-203 series are graded by application of the criteria in the Job Family Position Classification Standard (JFS) for Assistance Work in the Human Resources Management Group, GS-0200. Therefore, we have applied the grading criteria in the JFS to the appellant's position as discussed below.

The appellant disagrees with her agency's assignment of Levels 1-5 and 4-3. She agrees with her agency's assignment of Levels 2-3, 3-3, 5-3, 6-2, 7-B, 8-1, and 9-1. After careful review, we concur with her agency's assignment of factor-levels for Factors 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9, and thus have not specifically addressed them in our discussion that follows. However, while we agree with the level assigned for Factor 5, we have included that factor in our discussion based on the actual duties performed by the appellant, rather than those inaccurately described in her PD. We have also addressed the two factors in question.

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 description 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 standard. Our evaluation of the three factors noted above follows.

Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position

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

At Level 1-5, which is the highest level for this factor described in the JFS, the employee uses knowledge of, and skill in applying, a comprehensive body of HR rules, procedures, and technical methods sufficient to carry out limited projects, analyze a variety of routine facts, research minor complaints or problems that are not readily understood, and summarize HR facts and issues. Work illustrations at Level 1-5 for assistants engaged in employee benefits include providing advice and assistance to employees regarding employee benefit problems and issues; and researching, identifying, and explaining complicated and in-depth employee benefit-related issues such as health benefits conversion and complicated annuity calculations and information.

The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 1-5. Like that level, her position requires knowledge and skill in applying a comprehensive body of HR rules, procedures, and technical methods sufficient to carry out limited projects, analyze a variety of routine facts, research minor complaints or problems that are not readily understood, and summarize HR facts and issues. The appellant uses that knowledge and skill to research, identify, and explain complicated and in-depth employee benefit-related issues such as death benefits, health, long-term care and life insurance options, TSP, Social Security, public pension offset, windfall elimination, OWCP claims, continued benefits administered after separation, and Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA).

Like the Level 1-5 work illustration, she uses her knowledge of technical methods concerning retirement coverage sufficient to research, identify, and explain complicated annuity calculations. The appellant has a working knowledge of the various types and options of retirement coverage such as CSRS (both regular and offset); FERS; FICA; and Social Security. She furnishes advice and assistance to managers, current and former employees, firefighters and law enforcement employees, annuitants, and family members on the requirements, options, legality, timeliness, appropriateness, and potential problems of the various retirement and benefits options. She conducts interviews with those employees eligible for retirement, gathers information and data from the employee's OPF and other appropriate sources to determine creditable service for retirement eligibility, identifies and researches potential issues, and prepares retirement estimates and packages to forward to the NFC or other appropriate office(s).

Similar to Level 1-5, the appellant applies skill in determining the appropriate technical methods needed to research retirement and employee benefits, OWCP, FERCCA, military and civilian services in employees' OPFs, HR rules and procedures and other minor complaints or problems. The information, data or regulations the appellant provides to individuals is sometimes not readily understood, so she explains the information and summarizes the HR facts and issues regarding retirement programs and benefit options. The Forest Service has two automated computer programs/systems called DASHBOARD and SHIPS. The appellant, as well as employees, use DASHBOARD to research and gather information and data concerning the employee's service history, retirement computations, and benefits. If the employee does not present the appellant with information or data, the appellant researches, analyzes, explains,

advises, completes or assists the individuals in completing paperwork on the various aspects of the retirement and/or benefit options and requirements.

This factor is evaluated at Level 1-5 and 750 points are credited.

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 highest level for this factor described in the JFS, the work requires the performance of different and unrelated steps in accomplishing HR assignments and processes. HR assistants at this level analyze factual data, identify the scope and nature of the problems or issues, and determine the appropriate action from many alternatives. They identify and analyze HR issues and/or problems to determine their interrelationships and to determine the appropriate methods and techniques needed to resolve them. The work illustration at Level 4-3 for assistants performing employee benefits indicates that they provide information and assistance to employees concerning issues and intricate employee benefits provisions. This includes information on program requirements, processing procedures, and issues of various types on retirement programs, e.g., voluntary, optional, disability, discontinued service, early out, buy-outs. Assistants at this level also explain survivor benefits, computations, health and life insurance options, public pension offset, windfall elimination, Social Security, TSP, and other current and emerging provisions. They help employees with problems in understanding benefits requirements, and in applying for and obtaining benefits.

The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 4-3. Similar to that level, her work requires the performance of various technical duties which involve differing and unrelated processes and methods where she must analyze factual data to resolve problems and issues, and determine the appropriate methods and techniques needed to resolve them. Like the Level 4-3 work illustration, the appellant provides information and assistance to employees concerning issues and intricate employee benefits provisions. She furnishes guidance to current and former employees, firefighters and law enforcement officers, annuitants, survivors, and eligible family members regarding program requirements, processing procedures, and issues of various types on retirement programs, health and life insurance options, TSP, OWCP, and other current and emerging provisions. She determines creditable service for retirement purposes; determines if military service is creditable and for what purposes; determines if annuity estimates, whether manually or automatically prepared by the agency DASHBOARD are as accurate as needed for submittal to appropriate offices outside of the her agency; and completes all retirement paperwork. The appellant explains to individual employees, family members, or at employee group briefings, programs such as survivor benefits (including computations), health and life insurance options, public pension offset, windfall elimination, Social Security, and TSP. She helps employees with problems applying for benefits. In doing work related to workers' compensation, the appellant gives advice to employees, supervisors, and medical officers to ensure appropriate documentation is completed adequately and accurately. Like Level 4-3, she determines interrelationships and appropriate methods and techniques needed to resolve problems employees or non-employees are having in understanding the benefits requirements and obtaining benefits.

The appellant's work routinely involves preparing complicated retirement estimates and complex creditable service computations. Examples of problems typically handled by the appellant include those involving retired military service which is only creditable for leave and retirement purposes if there has been a military service deposit; erroneous retirement coverage (FERCCA); advising employees on the pros and cons of disability retirement; and reconstructing service histories when Standard Form 50s are missing, incorrect, or incomplete. These complicating factors are typical of the work described at Level 4-3. The appellant must also resolve problems involving OWCP. Comparable to this level, individual circumstances vary significantly, so the appellant must determine the most appropriate methods, guidelines, and any available resources for resolving the various problems and issues.

This factor is evaluated at Level 4-3 and 150 points are credited.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

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

At Level 5-3, which is the highest level for this factor described in the JFS, the work involves treating a variety of routine problems, questions, or situations using established procedures, such as explaining benefits options available to employees based upon analysis of individual cases. The work has a direct effect on the quality and adequacy of employee records, program operations, and services provided through the HRO. Work also affects the social and economic well being of persons serviced through the HRO. The work illustration at Level 5-3 for assistants performing employee benefits work describes those who explain benefits options available to employees based upon analysis of individual cases, and processing claims requiring identifying and substantiating relevant information. Their work affects the quality and adequacy of services the employee benefits program provides.

The appellant's position meets but does not exceed Level 5-3. Like that level, she deals with a variety of routine benefits problems, questions and issues within her HRO, and resolves problems using established procedures. Her work directly affects the quality and adequacy of employee records, the operations of the HR program and the services provided by her office. Similar to the work illustration at Level 5-3, she explains benefit options available to employees based upon analysis of individual cases, and processes claims requiring identifying and substantiating relevant information. The appellant works to resolve employee benefits issues and problems. For example, she resolves problems with employees who have been placed into the wrong retirement system, or corrects errors found in the calculation of the service computation date(s) (SCDs) due to an error based on military service records, or improper credit given for non-qualifying appointments. She resolves technical problems and takes actions in accordance with established criteria, guidelines, and/or practices. The appellant's work includes administering and providing assistance regarding several retirement options (e.g., CSRS-both regular and offset, FERS, FICA, and disability retirement), OWCP, TSP, FEHB, FEGLI, and identifying potential errors in retirement service designations through case review. Similar to Level 5-3, the appellant assists employees and beneficiaries on retirement and benefits matters; reviews retirement estimates and paperwork prepared by the automated system ensuring that the

data reflects accurate and current information; reviews all benefit forms, determines creditable Federal service, reviews OPFs for accuracy, and prepares for benefits open seasons. She also provides employee benefits information to employees through briefings, e.g., hiring information sessions held for annual summer-hires.

Like Level 5-3, the appellant's work has a direct affect on the quality and adequacy of employee records, program operations, and services provided through the HRO, e.g., providing guidance on employee benefits, and ensuring accurate and timely retirement calculations. Similar to Level 5-3, the accuracy and adequacy of the appellant's work impacts the social and economic well being of those serviced through the HRO, e.g., processing benefits changes, retirement applications, and OWCP claims in an accurate and timely manner.

This factor is evaluated at Level 5-3 and 150 points are credited.

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	3-3	275
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>		1,685

A total of 1,685 points falls within the GS-8 range (1,605 - 1,850 points) on the grade conversion table in the JFS. Therefore, the appellant's position is graded at the GS-8 level.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Human Resources Assistant (Employee Benefits), GS-203-8.