

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

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Visitor Information Assistant
GS-303-4

Organization: [name] Area
[name] Field Office
[name] District Office
Division of Nonrenewable Resources
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
[city and state]

OPM decision: GS-303-4
Title to be determined by agency

OPM decision number: C-0303-04-09

Judith A. Davis for

Robert D. Hendler
Classification and Pay Claims
Program Manager
Merit System Audit and Compliance

7/8/2010

Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), this decision constitutes a certificate which 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 (Introduction)*, appendix 4, Section G (address provided in appendix 4, section H).

As discussed in this decision, the appellant's position description (PD) of record must be revised to meet the PD standard of adequacy in the *Introduction*. The revised PD must be submitted to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) office that accepted this appeal within 30 calendar days of the date of this decision.

Decision sent to:

[appellant's name and address]

[servicing HR office name and address]

Director of Personnel
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Introduction

The Dallas Oversight and Accountability Group (now Dallas Oversight) of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal on November 9, 2009, from [name]. The appellant's position is currently classified as Visitor Information Assistant (VIA), GS-303-4, but he believes it should be classified at the GS-5 grade level in the GS-303, the GS-025 Park Ranger, or the GS-1001 General Arts and Information Series. The position is located at the [name] Area, [name] Field Office, [name] District Office, Division of Nonrenewable Resources, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Department of the Interior, in [city and state]. We received the complete agency's administrative report on March 22, 2010. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

Background and general issues

On May 24, 2009, the appellant requested a desk audit of his position from the [state] State Office's human resources office (HRO). After waiting several months with no response, the appellant cancelled his desk audit request and subsequently forwarded his appeal to OPM.

The appellant believes he is performing work similar to National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service positions classified at the GS-5 grade level. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM position classification standards (PCS) and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Other methods or factors of evaluation are not authorized for use in determining the classification of a position, such as comparison to positions which may or may not have been properly classified.

Like OPM, the appellant's agency must classify positions based on comparison to OPM's PCSs and guidelines. In accordance with 5 CFR 511.612, agencies are required to review their own classification decisions for identical, similar, or related positions to ensure consistency with OPM certificates. Consequently, the appellant's agency has primary responsibility for ensuring its positions are classified consistently with OPM appeal decisions. If the appellant believes his position is classified inconsistently with another, then he may pursue this matter by writing to his agency headquarters' HRO. He should specify the precise organizational location, series, title, grade, and responsibilities of the positions in question. The agency should explain to him the differences between his position and the others, or classify those positions in accordance with this appeal decision.

Position information

The appellant and two other VIAs occupy identical additional positions assigned to the [area]. Known as [phrase], [area] and its [number] acres of [activities] is one of the State's most popular destinations for [activity] and attracts approximately 220,000 visitors yearly. The [area] is located 75 miles away from the BLM's [field office], which is responsible for overall management of the [area].

The [area] Manager, the appellant's first-level supervisor, is an Outdoor Recreation Planner (GS-023-11 position) and the appellant's second-level supervisor is currently the Assistant Field

Manager for Non-Renewable Resources (GS-340-12 position) who is located at the [field office]. The [area] Manager position has been largely vacant since January 2008, but the position was recently filled by an individual on 30-day details to assist with the busy season. The Field Manager (GS-340-13 position), the appellant's third-level supervisor, was also vacant until recently. The Assistant Field Manager for Non-Renewable Resources served as Acting Field Manager from May 2009 to June 2010, when the Field Manager position was filled. According to the Acting Field Manager and the [area] Manager, the VIA's reporting relationship may change soon with the Field Manager position serving as the second-level supervisor.

The appellant performs work in a visitor center (VC), pay booth, or campground setting. He estimates spending 70 percent of his time in the VC. The VC is open year-round from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. but is closed on Tuesday and Wednesday. The hours are extended in the summer, operating from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. The VIAs perform daily activities to support the VC's operations including performing opening and closing shift functions; collecting fees for daily, seasonal, and annual passes; issuing entrance receipts, passes, and stickers in accordance with established guidelines; disseminating information about the area, activities, directions, etc; treating the minor injuries of walk-in visitors; restocking brochures; greeting and directing callers and visitors; retrieving money for daily use fees from the self-pay tubes located in the VC's parking lot; and completing sales transactions for the gift shop owned by the Canyonlands Natural History Association (CNHA). These duties require operating an electronic cash register and credit card machine. The other two VIAs perform additional duties including serving in a lead cashier capacity or overseeing responsibility for the CNHA gift shop (e.g., inventorying, ordering, and reporting of activity).

The appellant estimates he spends 25 percent of his time in the pay booth. The VIAs rotate responsibility for operating the cash-only pay booth. These duties are similar to the fee collection responsibilities in the VC but without the distraction of the VC's additional services and functions. At the booth, the appellant collects appropriate fees, checks money to ensure it is not counterfeit, and makes change. When visitors age 62 and up purchase senior passes, he records information including names, addresses, and birthdates. He also completes reports with a breakdown of money collected and the number of passes sold.

The appellant estimates spending five percent of his time in the campgrounds. The work entails answering visitor questions, posting signs on the information kiosks, patrolling the 255 camping sites, and issuing warnings for failure to pay and other violations of BLM rules and regulations regarding the protection of the area, resources, or visitors.

The Acting Field Manager certified to the accuracy of the appellant's PD, number [number]. Based on our fact-finding, we identified some discrepancies in the description of the appellant's duties. In a March 22, 2010, statement to OPM, the appellant said his PD contains inaccuracies and fails to fully describe his current duties and responsibilities. He states:

Several of the duties described in the PD are not performed by the VIA at [area]. As an example under Major duties number 2 it states that the VIAs “write correspondence to visitors.” VIAs are not allowed to write correspondences to visitors. Also under number 2 it states “assists with scheduling of interpretive programs.” The [area] has no interpretive programs. Under number 4 it states “assists in training seasonal employee employees [sic].” [Area] has no seasonal employees. Under number 5 it states “delegates routine duties and oversees completion of the given assignment.” Since the VIAs are all GS-4’s we carry out are [sic] duties and we delegate nothing. We do not oversee the completion of duties.

Our review confirmed the appellant’s statements. OPM views a PD as adequate for classification purposes when it is considered so by a person knowledgeable of the occupation and the classification standards and is supplemented by current information about the position’s organization, functions, programs, and procedures. Although we find the PD of record covers the major duties assigned to and performed by the appellant, these discrepancies are sufficient to warrant correction so as to meet PD standard of adequacy discussed in section III.E of the *Introduction*. The appellant’s agency must revise his PD to meet that standard as discussed on page ii of this decision.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted telephone audits with the appellant on April 12, 2010, and June 8, 2010. In addition, we conducted a telephone interview with the Acting Field Manager on June 9, 2010, and the Acting [area] Manager on June 18, 2010. In reaching our classification decision, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as all other information of record furnished by the appellant and his agency, including the PD of record.

Series and title determination

The agency assigned the appellant’s position to the GS-303, Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series. The appellant does not specifically disagree with the GS-303 series, but he proposes other series including the Park Ranger Series, GS-025, or the General Arts and Information Series, GS-1001. His initial request to OPM did not include any work-based comparisons or examples to support classifying his position to either series.

The appellant’s position is a mixed series position involving work covered by more than one occupational series. The *Introduction* and *The Classifier’s Handbook* provides guidance in classifying mixed positions. The most appropriate series for the position depends on consideration of a number of factors but, in general, the grade-controlling duties will determine the series. Sometimes the highest level of work performed does not represent the most appropriate series, and the series can be determined only after considering other factors including paramount qualifications required, sources of recruitment, and the background knowledge required. Further, the *Introduction* instructs that only duties occupying a significant and substantial part of the position (i.e., at least 25 percent of the time) can affect the grade. Therefore, only VC and pay booth work can be considered in determining the classification of the appellant’s position.

The Information and Arts Group, GS-1000, includes all classes of positions involving professional, artistic, technical, or clerical work (1) in the communication of information and ideas through verbal, visual, or pictorial means; (2) the collection, custody, presentation, display, and interpretation of art works, cultural objects, and other artifacts; or (3) a branch of fine or applied arts such as industrial design, interior design, or musical composition. There are limited aspects of the appellant's work (e.g., answering inquiries; providing visitors with recreation information; and distributing brochures and pamphlets) which could partially meet (1) of this definition. Overall, however, the GS-1000 Group description does not closely match the appellant's primary and paramount work as it is clearly extends to fee collection, recordkeeping, and other clerical tasks not appropriately evaluated by the GS-1000 Group. Unlike the GS-1000 Group, the appellant's position does not require writing, editing, and language ability; artistic skill and ability; knowledge of foreign languages; ability to evaluate and interpret information and cultural materials; the practical application of technical esthetic principles combined with manual skill and dexterity; or related clerical skill.

The GS-025 series covers positions performing work in the conservation and use of Federal park resources. This involves functions such as park conservation; natural, historical, and cultural resources management; and the development and operation of interpretive and recreational programs for the benefit of the visiting public. The GS-025 PCS provides examples of the typical duties found in this occupation. One of the three broad functional areas described in the PCS involves visitor protection and service activities such as operation of campgrounds, marinas, picnic areas, and other recreation facilities; search and rescue or other emergency services; boat, road, or other patrol activities for enforcement and inspection purposes; traffic control; and fee collection.

We agree the GS-025 PCS appears to fit in terms of providing grading criteria comparable to some of the appellant's work. To illustrate, the GS-025 PCS provides work examples at the GS-3 level, as follows:

At a visitor center information desk, answers visitors' questions that are usually routine and repetitive and relate largely to factual situations, e.g., geographical location of campgrounds, picnic areas, boating areas, and other recreational areas. Obtains from and posts various information to records, such as number of visitors, survey information on length of visitor stay, size of visiting parties, and patterns of visitor use. Maintains supply of information materials and other stock items; sells books and other items.

At an entrance station, answers visitors' questions and explains regulations covering common park use situations, such as campground reservations and rules; collects fees, sells permits, and safeguards and balances collected funds; maintains records on accountable permits and stock items; and controls vehicular traffic.

In applying the GS-025 grading criteria, the appellant's work meets but does not exceed the GS-3 grade level. His position does not meet the GS-4 level, where park rangers perform (as a major duty) a variety of assignments including the following: confirming or assisting in establishing Government property lines; collecting and recording information on water quality and sediment samples, vegetation, exotic plant infestation, etc; conducting a radio dispatch operation;

enforcing laws and regulations regarding park use; operating a “back country” office; conducting scheduled and special patrols of land and water areas; and developing and conducting interpretive talks and guided tour programs. The GS-025 PCS fails to describe or consider the full depth and breadth of the appellant’s clerical and assistance work at the VC and pay booth. In addition, the GS-025 does not provide a career path in that none of the [field office] or [area] positions are classified in the GS-025 series. The Acting Field Manager also said candidates are not required to have past experience when recruiting for VIA positions, but the inability to recruit for candidates with park ranger qualifications has no impact on recruiting efforts. For the reasons discussed above, the appellant’s position is not appropriately assigned to the GS-025 series.

The appellant’s work is covered by the GS-303 series, which covers positions performing or supervising clerical, assistant, or technician work for which no other series is appropriate. Like the appellant’s, the work requires knowledge of the procedures and techniques involved in carrying out the work of an organization and involve application of procedures and practices within the framework of established guidelines. We find the GS-303 series is most appropriate overall since no other series covers the primary and paramount work of the position. The GS-303 series does not have published titles, and the agency may assign a title following the guidance in the *Introduction*.

Standards determination

The GS-303 series does not contain grade-level criteria, but it instructs using the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work (Guide) when grading positions like the appellant’s.

The agency’s evaluation statement determined the grade of the appellant’s position by comparison to the Guide alone. However, the appellant’s fee collection responsibilities require collecting money and making change, operating cash registers and credit card machines, counting register tills at the start and finish of each shift, and preparing deposits. This work is covered by the Cash Processing Series, GS-530. The series includes positions involving clerical work in the receipt, disbursement, examination, deposit, custody, or other clerical processing of cash items, when this includes direct handling of the cash items and use of cash accountability control methods. We evaluated the appellant’s fee collection duties by reference to the Job Family Standard for Clerical and Technical Accounting and Budget Work, GS-500, used for evaluating GS-530 work. We determined this work is classifiable to the GS-3 level and, based on the grade determination that follows, is graded lower than his other clerical and assistance work. Therefore, we will not discuss this work further.

Grade determination

The Guide provides general criteria for use in determining the grade level of nonsupervisory clerical and assistance work. Administrative support work of the kind described in the Guide is performed in the offices, hospitals, and numerous other settings in Federal agencies. The Guide describes the general characteristics of each grade level from GS-1 through GS-7, and uses the following two criteria for grading purposes: *Nature of Assignment* (which includes knowledge

required and complexity of the work) and *Level of Responsibility* (which includes supervisory controls, guidelines, and contacts).

Nature of Assignment

At the GS-4 level, work involves performing a full range of standard clerical assignments and resolving recurring problems. The work consists of related steps, processes, or methods requiring the employee to identify and recognize differences among a variety of recurring situations. The action to take or response to make varies in nature and sequence due to differences in the characteristics of each case or transaction. GS-4 work also requires some subject-matter knowledge of an organization's programs and operations; type of business practice such as maintaining inventory records and replenishing supplies; or a body of standardized rules, processes, or operations. The knowledge is needed to determine what is being done, why the action is being taken, and how it must be accomplished.

At the GS-5 level, work involves performing a full range of standard and non-standard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of non-recurring problems. Work involves a variety of assignments involving different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. The employee must identify and understand the issues involved in each assignment and determine what steps and procedures are necessary and the order of their performance. Completion of each transaction typically involves selecting a course of action from a number of possibilities. The work requires extensive knowledge of an organization's rules, procedures, operations, or business practices to perform the more complex, interrelated, or one-of-a kind clerical processing procedures.

The appellant's position meets the GS-4 level. As at this level, his work involves performing the full range of standard clerical assignments and resolving recurring problems relating to the day-to-day operations of the [area's] VC. His duties include, but are not limited to, greeting and providing general information to visitors; explaining [area's] and BLM's rules, regulations, and policies; tracking statistics of the number of visitors, passes sold, accidents, and injuries; conducting sales transactions for CNHA merchandise; distributing brochures and other printed material; and reconciling discrepancies between funds received and sales records. The appellant's position requires applying different bodies of knowledge to perform this variety of tasks and functions; e.g., like the GS-4 level, his work requires knowledge of different BLM and [area] programs and operations. The appellant also applies this knowledge in responding to a variety of visitor questions concerning the area, various recreational opportunities, campground availability and amenities, and directions and routes of travel. In addition, his work requires knowledge of the BLM's standard business practices to safeguard and maintain accountability for funds collected by the [area]. Similar to the GS-4 level, his work requires identifying and recognizing differences among a variety of recurring situations to decide what steps, processes, and methods to use. For instance, the appellant determines the steps to take when (1) contacting and coordinating a response with emergency personnel if an accident or medical emergency occurs at the [area]; (2) deciding whether a daily, seasonal, yearly, or senior pass will meet a visitor's needs; and (3) completing a sales transaction using either the BLM's or the CNHA's cash register and funds as each are diligently kept separate.

The appellant's position does not meet the GS-5 level. His work does not involve performing a full range of standard and non-standard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of non-recurring problems. Instead, the appellant's work typically requires performing the same unvarying and standard clerical tasks to resolve recurring problems. The appellant explained the number of [area] visitors spike up in the spring, fall, and during particular holidays. During the peak season, he juggles responsibility for assisting this volume of visitors by issuing passes and advising them of the campground features, available amenities, etc. However, the appellant's work responsibilities do not deviate in sequence or substance regardless of it being [area's] peak or off-peak season.

Unlike the GS-5 level, the appellant's work does not involve different and unrelated steps, processes, or methods. His work is limited to supporting the daily operations of the VC and the pay booth. What and how tasks are completed is driven by past precedents, standard operating procedures (SOPs), performance plan expectations, and other BLM guidelines. Therefore, the nature of the appellant's work does not reflect a need to understand the situation and issues in considering what steps to take and the priorities as described at the GS-5 level. The appellant's opening shift functions are well-established and include the following: turn on lights, unlock door, hang up open sign, log onto computer, retrieve and post weather information, update recording for the telephone weather line, retrieve and count money from self-pay tubes, restock brochures, and retrieve and verify money in register tills. His closing shift functions include the following: lock door, hang up closed sign, close out registers, reconcile funds with sales records, ensure tills contain \$100 for the next business day, complete forms with the breakdown of money and passes sold, prepare deposit when necessary, and turn off lights. These and other examples of the appellant's work do not reflect the complex or one-of-a kind clerical processing demands described at the GS-5 level. The Acting [area] Manager also said the appellant's assignments are not deadline-driven (other than completing opening and closing shift functions at specific times of the day); therefore, unlike the GS-5 level, he is not required to make decisions on the order or priority of tasks based on his understanding of the situation.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-4 level.

Level of Responsibility

At the GS-4 level, the supervisor provides little assistance with recurring assignments. GS-4 employees use initiative in completing work according to accepted practices, but unusual situations may require assistance from the supervisor or a higher-level employee with completed work reviewed more closely. Work procedures have been established and specific guidelines are available. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require employees to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines, references, and procedures. The employee makes minor deviations in adapting guidelines to specific cases. Contacts are with coworkers and individuals outside the organization to exchange information and, in some cases, resolve problems related to the immediate assignment.

At the GS-5 level, the supervisor assigns work by defining objectives, priorities, and deadlines and provides guidance on assignments which do not have clear precedents. The employee works in accordance with accepted practices and completed work is evaluated for technical soundness,

appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. Extensive guides in the form of instructions, manuals, regulations, and precedents apply to the work. The number and similarity of guidelines and work situations require the employee to use judgment in locating and selecting the most appropriate guidelines for application and adapting them according to circumstances of the specific case or transaction. A number of procedural problems may arise which also require interpretation and adaptation of established guides. Often, the employee must determine which of several alternative guidelines to use. If existing guidelines cannot be applied, the employee refers the matter to the supervisor. Contacts are with a variety of persons within and outside the agency for the purpose of receiving or providing information relating to the work or for the purpose of resolving operating problems in connection with recurring responsibilities.

The appellant's position meets the GS-4 level. Similar to this level, his work is recurring and is covered by readily available SOPs and guidelines on how to accomplish the work. The Acting Field Manager said she and the VIAs drafted SOPs covering the typical work at the VC and pay booth. The draft SOPs are in the review stage. Regardless, they describe the actions, processes, and procedures the VIAs are currently expected to follow. The assortment of comprehensive guidelines covers the operating procedures, fee envelope collection process, pay booth collection process, and opening and closing the VC procedures. The appellant works independently, selecting the most appropriate guideline to fit a particular situation and working within the confines of the existing practices and SOPs. As at the GS-4 level, his regular contacts are with coworkers or the general public and involve exchanging information, advising visitors, and resolving problems related to immediate assignments (e.g., coordinating the emergency response after an accident occurs, resolving inaccuracies when counting and reconciling money collected, etc.).

The appellant's position does not meet the GS-5 level. Although he performs work with little or no daily oversight by the supervisor (especially with the first-level supervisor position vacant since January 2008 and the higher-level supervisors physically located at the [field office]), the GS-5 level anticipates regularly performing assignments with no clear precedents. In contrast, the appellant's work typically involves a confined set of responsibilities with clear precedents. The Acting Field Manager said she once assigned the appellant a task of gathering marketing information to promote the [area] (e.g., identifying potential locations for signs on the highway and the associated costs), but his work is generally repetitive with projects and unusual situations rarely occurring. Also unlike the GS-5 level, the appellant's work is reviewed for more than technical soundness, appropriateness, and effectiveness in meeting goals. He is held accountable for performing the tasks and procedures explicitly described in the SOPs. To illustrate, the following is from the SOP regarding selling annual passes:

In the top left drawer of the counter, we keep the annual passes and forms, remove the form and have the customer fill in all the fields needed. See sample form and pass on page #. They are as follows: (a) Name (b) address (c) city/state/zip (d) telephone number (e) vehicle information (1) make (2) model (3) year (4) color (5) license # (6) state (7) vin # if buying a second pass. Please tell the customer that we need to be able to read the information.

Next, tell the customer to read the two paragraphs under the line “2nd vehicle must be registered to the same owner” and initial after each.

Have them sign on their signature line and you sign on signature line of authorized official.

Along with describing the sale of annual passes, the SOP covers the following responsibilities: opening shift functions, handling money, accounting and filing, answering telephone, greeting customers, selling gift certificates, selling senior passes, and closing shift functions. Other SOPs provide a similar level of description. With the variety and detail of the SOPs, the appellant’s work does not require or permit interpreting and adapting guidelines to make it fit a particular work situation as described at the GS-5 level. In addition, the purpose of his work contacts involves sharing information, not resolving the [area’s] operating problems as expected at the GS-5 level.

This factor is properly evaluated at the GS-4 level.

Summary

Since both factors are evaluated at the GS-4 level, the position is properly evaluated at the GS-4 level.

Decision

The appellant’s position is properly classified as GS-303-4, with the title to be determined by the agency.