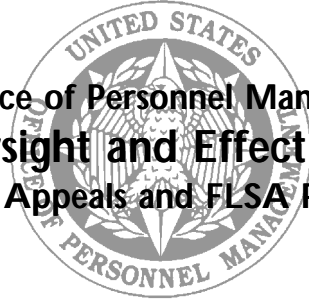


U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Classification Appeals and FLSA Programs



San Francisco Oversight Division
120 Howard Street, Room 760
San Francisco, CA 94105

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

Appellant: [The appellant]

Agency classification: Social Service Representative
GS-187-8

Organization: [The appellant's installation]

OPM decision: Social Service Representative
GS-187-8

OPM decision number: C-0187-08-01

Carlos A. Torrico
Classification Appeals Officer

August 25, 1999
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:

[The appellant's address]

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Introduction

On December 3, 1998, the San Francisco Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Social Service Representative, GS-187-8. However, she believes the grade level should be GS-11. The appellant works in the [appellant's installation]. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

General issues

The appellant believes that her position is undergraded, and points to other positions in her agency and other agencies which she contends are similar to hers but are classified at a higher level. Therefore, she believes that her job should also be classified at a higher grade. By law, we must classify positions solely by comparing their current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Since comparison to standards is the exclusive method for classifying positions, we cannot compare the appellant's position to others as a basis for deciding her appeal.

This decision is based on a careful review of all information submitted by the appellant and her agency. In addition, an OPM representative conducted a telephone audit with the appellant, followed by an interview with her supervisor. Both the appellant and her supervisor have certified to the accuracy of the appellant's official position description (number A0720).

In the record the appellant requests that should her position be upgraded on appeal, she receive retroactive pay. However, the U. S. Comptroller General states that an "...employee is entitled only to the salary of the position to which he is actually appointed, regardless of the duties performed. When an employee performs the duties of a higher grade level, no entitlement to the salary of the higher grade exists until such time as the individual is actually promoted.... Consequently, backpay is not available as a remedy for misassignments to higher level duties or improper classifications" (CG decision B-232695, December 15, 1989).

Position information

The appellant's duties are described in a standard position description used by the Department of the Army to describe social service representative duties at various Army installations. The primary purpose of the position is to coordinate and provide comprehensive pre-move and post-move briefings, orientations and workshops for military personnel and their families, and deal with a variety of cases involving specialized family needs. She presents a variety of orientation briefings tailored to specific assignment areas using Headquarters, Department of Army provided briefings materials as a basis for briefing content; she maintains and distributes the installation welcome packets and provides sponsorship training; she implements specialized family services for bicultural families and families separated from the military sponsor due to duty requirements; she performs or oversees paid and/or volunteer personnel who perform information referral and follow-up on program functions and establishes and maintains a comprehensive current file of

information on all area public, private and voluntary service organizations. In addition, the appellant receives client inquiries concerning community services, interviews clients to assess the type of assistance required, and collects and maintains a variety of data as required by governing program guidance to support management information needs. She is also tasked with developing and making recommendations for additional services to meet specialized installation/activity needs, and collects, maintains and analyzes data for planning and reporting purposes in accordance with governing program guidance. Finally, she prepares reports and surveys as appropriate to meet requirements outlined in regulations and as requested by higher headquarters.

The appellant's position description, results of our interviews, and other material of record furnish much more information about her duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series, title, and standard determination

This position has the primary responsibility for ensuring the provision of specialized relocation assistance services as well as the general support functions encompassed by the Relocation Assistance Program, and the Information, Referral and Follow-up Program. The appellant's work does not require professional counseling skills, or professional knowledge of social or behavioral science. The duties of this position are more closely related to the work performed by employees whose positions are classified in the Social Services Series, GS-187. As described in the classification standard for the GS-187 series (dated February 1965, and reissued in HRCD-6, January 1999 edition), that series includes positions that require application of specialized program knowledge and service skills in providing assistance to individuals and families served by social welfare programs. Work properly classified to this series may be performed either (a) in conjunction with professional social work or (b) in conformity with agency procedural instructions and standards of service. We find that the appellant's position is properly covered by the Social Services Series, GS-187, and titled Social Service Representative. Neither the agency nor the appellant disagrees. Because the GS-187 standard contains grade level criteria, we have applied it below to evaluate the grade of the appellant's position.

Grade determination

The classification standard for the Social Services Series, GS-187, uses two classification factors to evaluate the difficulty, responsibility and qualification requirements: (1) Nature and Range of Assigned Cases, and (2) Level of Responsibility. The standard does not isolate these two factors in the portion of the standard dealing with grade-level criteria. It does not deal with them separately because within each grade, supervision must be related to the difficulty of the service required in different types of cases. Our evaluation with respect to the grading factors follows.

As described on page 11 of the GS-187 standard, social service representatives at the GS-8 level work with considerable independence in providing assistance and service in a wide range of cases. Employees at this level have responsibility for (a) identifying needs and providing individualized assistance and service appropriate to a variety of specific problems in a wide range of cases

without prior approval of the supervisor, and (b) developing recommendations for planned use of agency resources and auxiliary services that are appropriate in difficult and complicated cases, but fall short of being unusually complex in nature. When dealing with a wide range of cases involving a variety of individualized problems of a less serious nature, the GS-8 social service representative takes the initiative in developing and implementing an appropriate plan of assistance and service, and keeps the supervisor informed of any unusual problems that arise. Supervision is usually limited to discussing progress of more serious cases, and a sampling review of case records and reports. Where more serious problems are encountered, the employee recommends plans to the supervisor for suitable programs of supplementary assistance and service, and reports back periodically on progress.

At the GS-9 level (pages 11-12), assignments of social service representatives are based on recognition of demonstrated superior skill and proven sound judgment in working with serious and complicated assistance problems that do not require professional casework. Assignments at this level include a preponderance of cases that have been selected for special service because of the client's very serious problems and circumstances, and thus requires unusual skill and judgment on the part of the social service representative. In addition, at the GS-9 level the employee has authority to make decisions as to the appropriate assistance and service in these very difficult cases on a continuing basis, and takes the initiative in providing assistance and service without prior approval of the supervisor. Supervision is received mainly through review of reports and by periodic discussions of progress of assigned cases.

The appellant's position favorably compares to the GS-8 level, but fails to meet the range and complexity of cases, and degree of responsibility found at the GS-9 level. Like the GS-8 level, in her role as the relocation assistance and information referral program coordinator, the appellant operates with considerable independence in providing service in a wide range of cases. Many of these entail providing specialized services (e.g., bicultural training), but unlike the GS-9 level they do not involve unusually complex situations where individuals are facing very serious problems. Similar to the GS-8 level, she deals with a varied range of relocation and referral issues and individual cases covering activities surrounding permanent changes of station to overseas locations, placement in housing, medical care facilities, community characteristics including available resources and services. To support her assistance work she uses and maintains at her installation a computerized database called the Standard Installation Topic Exchange Service (SITES). This program is an agency wide source of information on foreign and domestic installations within the Department of Defense covering such topics as data on the local community, housing, child and teen services, etc. Comparable to the GS-8 level, the appellant identifies and provides individualized and specific service to clients where problems of a less serious nature exist. For example, she is concerned with providing specialized family services for bicultural families and families separated from the military sponsor due to duty requirements. In that capacity she coordinates with a variety of local resources (e.g., educational institutions, community resources) to facilitate the cultural adaptation of family members to the overseas post of duty. Similar to the GS-8 level, although not focused on individual cases, the appellant develops a family support plan to address general family needs and required services in the event

of deployment/mobilization or other emergencies at the installation. Like the GS-8 level, the appellant independently performs her work on a wide variety of less serious cases. She keeps her supervisor informed of any unusual problems arising from her work with less complicated cases. Any cases involving complex problems of serious need, or controversial issues, are discussed with the supervisor in order to identify possible solutions and develop a recommended plan of action. Work in such cases is subject to periodic progress reports to the supervisor.

The nature and range of the appellant's cases, and level of her responsibility, do not meet the GS-9 level. Although we recognize that the appellant possesses extensive knowledge of family services from her years of experience in that field at a number of military installations, our fact-finding disclosed that she is not involved with the kinds of extremely serious family assistance cases typical of the GS-9 level. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, she renders assistance in a wide range of cases, some of which may have complicating factors (e.g., bicultural issues), but none of which are unusually complex in terms of the problems presented and the skill and judgment needed to resolve them. In addition, although she works with considerable independence, were she to encounter such very difficult cases she is not delegated the authority to make decisions on the type of assistance and service to provide without prior approval of the supervisor.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Social Service Representative, GS-187-8.