

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

Dallas Oversight Division  
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22  
Dallas, TX 75242-1027

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

**Appellants:** [appellants' names]

**Agency classification:** Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**Organization:** [appellants' facility]  
Air Force Academy  
Department of the Air Force  
USAF Academy, Colorado

**OPM decision:** Engineering Technician  
GS-802-9

**OPM decision number:** C-0802-09-41

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon

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Bonnie Brandon  
Classification Appeals Officer

February 15, 2002

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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:**

[appellants' names and address]

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## **Introduction**

On November 2, 2001, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal from [the appellants]. We received their agency's administrative report on December 18, 2001.

The appellants' position is currently classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9. The appellants appealed the classification of their position through the Department of Defense Civilian Personnel Management Service (CPMS), requesting that the position be classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-11. On August 31, 2001, the CPMS issued its decision that the appellants' current classification was correct. The appellants then appealed to OPM, again requesting that the position be classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-11.

We conducted an on-site audit of the appellants' position on January 10, 2002. The audit included interviews with the appellants and their first-level supervisor. In deciding this appeal, we fully considered the audit findings and all information of record provided by the appellants and their agency, including current work assignments and their position description of record. The appellants and their supervisor certify that the position description which the appellants are assigned, [number], is current and accurate.

## **Position information**

The appellants work in [their facility] at the U. S. Air Force Academy. The appellants provide technical support for mechanical engineering courses and research projects for cadets, faculty members, and external researchers. The research projects include a current study conducted by another university on aging aircraft, a project in which the appellants built a frame out of aluminum, or various studies on the strength of materials. Other research projects may be at the college-level or involve advance engineering topics. The appellants advise and oversee the cadets during courses that range from beginning to senior level and include subjects such as engineering fundamentals, dynamics, strength of materials, material properties, structural design, and automotive engineering. The senior-level courses involve the design, testing, and construction of projects, such as the formula car, minibaja, human-powered vehicle, and heavy lift aircraft used in competition. The appellants ensure compliance with safety program requirements. They also have responsibility for the hazardous materials and waste program for their facility. For example, they have catalogued the various hazardous materials used in the [facility] and have developed an inventory of manuals that provide explanations of characteristics of the hazardous materials and the proper procedures for processing, storing, and disposing of those materials.

In addition to their course and research support work, the appellants are responsible for maintaining the various areas in [their facility] which include the auto test facility, wood/metal shop, machine shop, dynamics area, metallography lab, heat treatment facility, electronics lab, and composites area. The appellants calibrate and maintain testing, electrical, optical, and mechanical equipment. The appellants ensure that all equipment is serviceable and that supplies are available. This involves finding sources or vendors who can provide the needed equipment or supplies, developing specifications, and purchasing the items.

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

The appellants do not dispute the series or title of their position. We agree with the agency's determination that the position is properly classified in the GS-802 Engineering Technician Series. This series covers positions that perform nonprofessional technical work such as research, development, design, construction, inspection, testing, or operation of engineering facilities, systems, equipment, or materials.

According to the standard for the GS-802 series, positions that perform work in two or more specializations are to be titled Engineering Technician. Since the appellants' work primarily deals with the specializations of materials and mechanics, the position is properly titled Engineering Technician.

We used the grading criteria in the GS-802 standard to evaluate the appellants' work.

### **Grade determination**

The GS-802 standard defines grade levels under two criteria: *Nature of assignment* and *Level of responsibility*. Our evaluation of the appellants' position in terms of these two criteria follows.

#### *Nature of assignment*

At the GS-9 level, engineering technicians perform a variety of work relating to the area of specialization that requires the application of a considerable number of different but established methods, procedures, and techniques. Assignments at this level usually involve independent responsibility for planning and conducting a complete conventional project of relatively limited scope, or a portion of a larger and more diverse project. These assignments require study, analysis, and consideration of several possible courses of action, techniques, general layouts, or designs and selection of the most appropriate. Changes are often made during the progress of an assignment to incorporate additional factors that could not be predicted. GS-9 level assignments typically require coordination of several parts, each requiring independent analysis and solution. When details are performed by other groups or individuals, the technician reviews, analyzes, and integrates their work.

The standard provides the following examples that are typical of work at the GS-9 level.

- A technician modifies established testing programs to determine the characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of aircraft or other vehicular electrical systems. The technician analyzes the drawings, specifications, and other data to determine the measurements which will be required at different points in an electrical system. The technician establishes a testing program to obtain the data under varying loads and operating conditions, modifying the test equipment and procedures as necessary.
- A technician develops equipment of moderate novelty and complexity (i.e., without critical performance requirements that are difficult to satisfy) such as engine parts, research instruments, or test devices. Professional engineers furnish information on the

purpose of equipment, basic requirements, and pertinent technical data. The technician searches for and studies available information and develops approaches.

GS-11 engineering technicians plan and accomplish complete projects or studies of a conventional nature requiring adaptation of general background data. Technicians at this level are typically confronted with a variety of complex problems that require considerable judgment to make sound engineering compromises and decisions. Related interests must often be considered, requiring frequent coordinative action with other personnel. There is a continuing requirement for contact work. GS-11 assignments require sound judgment to plan and coordinate phases and in selecting which of several sound alternatives is to be used. Ingenuity and creative thinking are required to devise new ways of accomplishing objectives and in adapting existing equipment or techniques to new uses.

The following examples are typical of work at the GS-11 level.

- A technician prepares designs and specifications for various utility systems, such as heating, plumbing, air conditioning, ventilating, pumping, gas supply, *and* pneumatic control systems for a technical laboratory or experimental building. Assignments involve systems for office buildings, technical laboratories, experimental buildings, pumping stations, and flood control facilities. Design problems require considerable adaptation of precedents or design of features for which precedents are not applicable.
- A technician conducts various experimental projects to develop electrical circuits or breadboards of systems characterized by performance requirements that are difficult to achieve because of combinations of conflicting characteristics or applications that differ from previous use. Projects may involve development of new equipment or systems, simplification of present equipment, standardization of equipment, or development of new design techniques. The technician plans the various phases, develops circuits and components, arranges for fabrication of pilot models, determines test procedures, evaluates test results, and makes changes to overcome deficiencies.

The appellants' assignments meet the GS-9 level. The cadets plan their engineering projects during classroom training, and the appellants review the plans and advise on the appropriateness of the design and materials. The appellants oversee all phases of the projects from beginning to completion. The projects often involve adjustments to account for changes that were not considered in the original plans. The appellants coordinate the changes with the cadets and faculty members to ensure the projects conform to required standards. Some of the research projects are difficult to conceptualize, and the appellants apply their knowledge of engineering principles to identify materials and equipment needs and to design and test models to meet research objectives. The appellants contact manufacturers, engineers, and vendors to identify and acquire supplies, tools, equipment, and materials that meet project specifications. These assignments are similar to those described in the examples for the GS-9 level that involve responsibility for conventional projects of relatively limited scope, a considerable number of different methods or techniques, and the need to consider several possible courses of action.

The GS-11 level is not met. The appellants' assignments involve complete projects that are more limited in scope than the broad level described at the GS-11 level. The projects overseen by the appellants may involve some unique features, but they do not involve the critical performance requirements or the wide variety of entire systems characteristic of the GS-11 level. The appellants' assignments are less complex than the experimental projects discussed in the examples. GS-11 level projects require a high level of planning and coordination of different phases. The course and research projects supported by the appellants do not impose this high degree of coordination.

This factor is evaluated at the GS-9 level.

### *Level of responsibility*

At the GS-9 level, the supervisor outlines requirements, provides information on any related work being performed, and furnishes general instructions as to the scope of objectives, time limitations, priorities, and similar aspects. The supervisor is available for consultation and advice where significant deviations from standard engineering practices must be made and gives more detailed instructions when distinctly new techniques are involved. Standard methods employed are seldom reviewed, but review is made for adequacy and for conformance with established policies, precedents, and sound engineering concepts. Contacts are primarily to resolve mutual problems and coordinate the work with personnel in related activities. Contacts outside the agency are usually arranged under supervisory guidance.

Technicians at the GS-11 level have considerable freedom in planning work and carrying out assignments. The supervisor makes assignments in terms of the major objectives, providing background information and advice on specific unusual problems or matters requiring coordination with other groups. Unusual or controversial problems may be discussed with the supervisor, but technical assistance is infrequently sought or required. The supervisor is advised of progress, but there is little review during the progress of typical assignments. Completed work is reviewed for general adequacy, conformity to purpose of the assignment, and sound engineering judgment. Contacts at the GS-11 level tend to become more extensive than at lower levels because of the increased scope of assignments.

The appellants work under the supervision of a [military director] who outlines overall requirements and furnishes general information as to priorities and objectives. Assignments may be issued orally or in the form of work schedules, lesson plans, or research objectives. The appellants work independently on day-to-day operations and keep their supervisor informed of work accomplishments through weekly meetings. The appellants' supervisor stated he provides very little technical supervision or direction and relies on them to make independent decisions and solve problems as they arise. The appellants have frequent contacts with faculty, staff, cadets, researchers, and vendors to gather or exchange information regarding [the facility's] projects, equipment, materials, and supplies.

A careful reading of the Engineering Technician standard indicates that to meet the GS-11 level criteria, the responsibilities must be exercised within the context of performing GS-11 level assignments. The responsibilities exercised by the appellants are somewhat similar to the GS-11

criteria in that the appellants have considerable freedom in planning and carrying out the work, wide latitude to make daily decisions, and receive only limited review during the course of classroom and research projects. However, their responsibilities fall short of the overall intent of the GS-11 level because the complexity and scope of their assignments do not exceed the GS-9 level, as discussed previously under *Nature of assignment*. Because the appellants' responsibilities fall short of the GS-11 criteria, their level of responsibility is evaluated at GS-9.

### *Summary*

Both classification factors are evaluated at the GS-9 level. The grade of the appellants' position is GS-9.

### **Decision**

The appellants' position is properly classified as Engineering Technician, GS-802-9.