

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



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

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

Appellant: [The appellant]

Agency classification: Statistical Assistant
GS-1531-06

Organization: Family Advocacy Program
Air Force Medical Operations Agency
Department of the Air Force
Brooks Air Force Base, Texas

OPM decision: GS-303-05
Title at agency's discretion

OPM decision number: C-0303-05-03

/s/ _____
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

8/5/98 _____
Date

As provided in section 511.612 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (5 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).

Since this decision lowers the grade of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the sixth pay period after the date of this decision, as permitted by 5 CFR 511.702. The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.

The personnel office must also determine if the appellant is entitled to grade or pay retention, or both, under title 5, United States Code 5362 and 5363 and 5 CFR 536. If the appellant is entitled to grade retention, the two-year retention period begins on the date this decision is implemented.

Decision sent to:

[The appellant's name
and address]

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Introduction

On March 13, 1998, the Dallas Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management received a classification appeal from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Statistical Assistant, GS-1531-06. The appellant believes her position should be classified as Management Assistant, GS-344-07. The appealed position is assigned to the Family Advocacy Program, Air Force Medical Operations Agency, Department of the Air Force, at Brooks Air Force Base, Texas. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code. To help decide the appeal, an Oversight Division representative conducted an on-site audit of the appellant's position on July 16, 1998.

General issues

The appellant's position was audited by a classification specialist from the local Civilian Personnel Office (CPO) in December of 1996. The position was reclassified from Data Support Assistant (OA), GS-303-06, to Statistical Assistant, GS-1531-06, in March 1997. The position was audited again five months later by the CPO, but no changes resulted at that time in the classification of the position.

The majority of work performed by the appellant from January 1996 through January 1998 was essentially as a research assistant to her military supervisor, the Director of Research, and to a contract research psychologist on various research projects dealing with Family Advocacy Program issues, such as child and spouse deaths by maltreatment, spouse abuse treatment, and child and spouse recidivism. Her primary work during this time was assisting with new and ongoing major research studies. In August 1997, the military supervisor left and the appellant was placed under the supervision of the new incoming military person. The new military supervisor began to restructure the appellant's work to match that of three other statistical assistants in the division, who were also on the same position description (PD) as the appellant. The appellant's position was no longer to operate primarily as the personal research assistant to the Director of Research or to psychologists conducting major research studies. In April 1998, the appellant's position was placed under the supervision of a research psychologist, the Research and Data Program Manager, who also supervised the other three statistical assistants. This is the current supervisor to the subject position.

Whereas the appellant's duties have changed over the past several months due to the position being restructured, our appeal decision addresses the appellant's current assigned duties and responsibilities, in accordance with title 5, United States Code 5112, rather than considering her past work. Likewise, we do not classify the position in terms of any projected duties and responsibilities that may occur in the future.

The appellant and her previous supervisor have certified that the appellant's PD is an accurate and complete statement of the position's duties and responsibilities. The current supervisor has attested to the accuracy of the PD. However, we find that the appellant's PD, number 80353270, does not accurately describe her current major duties and responsibilities and therefore does not meet the standard of adequacy described in the Introduction to the Classification Standards. The appellant's

agency must revise her PD to meet that standard. Inaccuracies of the PD are noted under the Position Information and Grade Determination sections of this decision.

Position information

The appellant's position is located in the Family Advocacy Program (FAP), which is headquartered at Brooks Air Force Base. The Family Advocacy Program is part of the Air Force Medical Operations Agency, which acts as the agent for the Air Force Surgeon General in carrying out Family Advocacy Program prevention, record keeping, reporting, clinical intervention, and program evaluation. The mission of the Family Advocacy Program is to build healthy communities throughout the Air Force by developing, implementing, and evaluating programs designed for the prevention and treatment of child and spouse abuse. One of the major functions of the Program is designing and managing research studies to enhance the efficacy and quality of the Program. Within the Family Advocacy Program, data on child and spouse abuse is collected by Air Force bases throughout the world and reported to the appellant's organization. Military members of the Air Force and their families may receive varying kinds of FAP services offered at their respective bases. Those receiving treatment services are administered assessments which measure such factors as marital satisfaction, family environment, child abuse potential, etc. As part of the treatment process, the scores on these assessments are tracked to measure a person's (or family's) initial status and then improvements that are or are not made after undergoing treatment services. This data is collected at the field location sites and then submitted to the appellant's organization for research and tracking purposes. The appellant is involved with the entry, maintenance, editing, tracking, and reviewing of this data as it is submitted to her office from the field locations.

The appellant's position is involved in database management duties and the inputting and reviewing of data in support of the Family Advocacy Program. She works with several databases, consisting of varying kinds of data obtained from reports submitted by the field FAP offices. Data is submitted for tracking purposes and for further use in the Program's research and evaluation program. Her primary responsibility is with the research spouse maltreatment database and first-time parents prevention program database. She reviews incoming hard copy or electronic data submissions from field installations for accuracy, proper coding, logical flow, or missing data fields. For data submitted by hard copy, she inputs to the two databases for which she has primary responsibility.

A new automation program has recently been introduced to the Program. The system, called FADAP, allows FAP personnel at field sites to directly enter their data to the appropriate databases, rather than preparing and submitting hard copies to the appellant's office. The automated program is being phased in over a period of time so that the field will not have to instantly convert to this new system. At this time, a large percentage of the field staff is trained and bases are beginning to input their own data into the system. It is estimated by the Director of Research that the field will be fully automated by July 1999. At the present time, data is being submitted electronically by some installations, but much of the data is still submitted via hard copy reports. Once the new automated system is fully implemented, the time spent by the appellant (and the other three statistical assistants) on data entry will be minimized significantly.

The appellant is to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data submitted and entered to her databases. She advises FAP field personnel in the collection and submission of information to the research statistical program. Since she is very knowledgeable of the various databases and fields of information contained within, she provides assistance occasionally to the statistician on such matters as determining what database fields to focus on to gain certain kinds of information. The appellant supports major research studies which are contracted out and conducted by universities or other researchers by providing information on the kind of data contained within the databases. Although the opportunity is fairly rare, the appellant may participate in the design of data collection instruments for special internal data management studies and then participate in the collection of the data. She makes recommendations to improve, add, or change procedures or approaches, including recommendations on the program evaluation standards. On occasion, the appellant may apply basic descriptive statistical techniques to data to determine frequency distributions, percentages, and averages. She responds to requests for social security number background checks, whereby she cross checks a social security number with the names and social security numbers of individuals shown to have a history of abuse in the Program's maltreatment databases.

The PD of record does not accurately characterize the current major duties and responsibilities of the appellant. As presently structured and operating, the appealed position does not perform some of the duties described in the PD's Introduction section or in the first, third, and fourth paragraphs of the PD's Major Duties section. Specifically, the appellant's position typically does not perform *analyses* of surveys and other data; identify and analyze problems encountered in actual research situations; prepare a variety of reports, graphs, and forms; determine data categories to be included in ad hoc reports; *interpret* data on the basis of its significance; develop and design, from rough draft, briefing slides, charts, and graphs; plan the method and sequence of presentations; *construct* surveys and *analyze* results from surveys; or perform library research and literature reviews.

Series, title, and standard determination

The GS-1531 Statistical Assistant Series covers positions that require primarily the application of knowledge of statistical methods, procedures, and techniques to the collection, processing, compilation, computation, analysis, editing, and presentation of statistical data. The work does not require the application of professional knowledge of statistics or other disciplines. Statistical assignments typical of this series include processing schedules, questionnaires, and similar reporting forms to obtain and compile data for specific studies and reports; editing schedules, questionnaires, or similar reporting forms for completeness, internal consistency, relevance, and similar purposes; developing and designing schedules, reporting forms, and questionnaires; making special studies requiring the search for and selection and evaluation of data from published and unpublished sources and the preparation of such data for inclusion in reports and publications; performing scientific support work for statisticians and other professional personnel; and developing plans, programs, methods, procedures, and techniques for collection, processing, compilation, and presentation of statistical data.

The appellant's assigned work does not require the knowledge and application of statistical methods, procedures, and techniques to the collection, processing, compilation, analysis, editing, and presentation of statistical data. The appealed position is responsible for the input, review, and maintenance of certain data which is submitted to the headquarters office of the Family Advocacy Program. The data is entered to databases and used to track Family Advocacy Program activities and cases and used in research studies on the issues of prevention and treatment of child and spouse abuse. Although the data is ultimately used for these purposes, the appellant's position is not required to have a knowledge of and to perform statistical procedures, techniques, or methods in accomplishing the assigned work. For example, she is primarily responsible for entering data; reviewing the data submitted by bases for omissions or erroneous entries; tracking the data; performing social security number background checks; answering questions from field personnel regarding data collection instruments, the electronic FADAP system, and databases; providing information on data categories within databases; and making recommendations on methods and procedures for collecting and submitting the required data from the field. The appellant's work may be a *part* of the overall tracking and research effort, but it is not the type of work which requires statistical assistant knowledge. Therefore, the GS-1531 Statistical Assistant Series is inappropriate for the position.

The GS-344 Management Assistant Series, the series requested by the appellant, is also inappropriate. The GS-344 series includes positions involved in supervising or performing clerical and technical work in support of management analysis and program analysis, the purposes of which are to evaluate and improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity of organizations and programs. The work requires a practical knowledge of the purposes, methods, and techniques of management analysis and/or program analysis and the structures, functions, processes, objectives, products, services, resource requirements, and similar features of Government programs and organizations. The appellant's position does not require knowledge of the purposes, methods, techniques, and functions of management or program analysis.

The knowledge required of the appellant's position fits within the GS-303 Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series. This series covers clerical, assistant, or technician work which requires a knowledge of the procedures and techniques involved in carrying out the work of an organization and involves the application of procedures and practices within the framework of established guidelines. The work covered by this series is not classifiable in any other series. The work and knowledge required of the appellant's position best fit within the GS-303 series. The appellant is required to have a knowledge of the organization, mission, and principles of the Family Advocacy Program; the organizations serviced; specific office practices and procedures to perform data support work; and database programs, capabilities, and procedures. She uses this knowledge to perform the kind of work described previously in this section. Since the GS-303 series does not specify titles, the title for the appellant's position is at the discretion of the agency. The GS-303 standard indicates that the agency may construct any title consistent with guidance in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards.

The appellant's position is graded using the Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work.

Grade determination

The Grade Level Guide for Clerical and Assistance Work uses two classification factors: nature of assignment and level of responsibility. Our evaluation with respect to these factors follows.

Nature of assignment

At the GS-5 level, work consists of performing a full range of standard and nonstandard clerical assignments and resolving a variety of nonrecurring problems. Work includes 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.

At the GS-6 level, work typically entails processing a wide variety of transactions for more than one type of assigned activity or functional specialization. Assignments are subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. Such issues must be examined that a course of action has substantive impact on the outcome of the assignment. Work requires comprehensive knowledge of rules, regulations, and other guidelines relating to completing assignments in the program area assigned. This knowledge is usually attained through extensive, increasingly difficult, and practical experience and training in the subject matter field. The work also requires ability to interpret and apply regulatory and procedural requirements to process unusually difficult and complicated transactions.

The appellant's work involves responsibility for several different kinds of standard and non-standard assignments, each with differing processes, as at the GS-5 level. She receives, reviews, edits, and enters data submitted from the field into two distinct databases, the research spouse maltreatment and first-time parents prevention databases. In reviewing the data submissions for accuracy and providing assistance to the field FAP personnel, she uses her knowledge of the Program's research objectives, the research instruments administered within the Program and their scoring procedures, appropriate methods and procedures for collecting and submitting data, the FADAP system, and Family Advocacy Program guidance and standard operating procedures. She solves problems in accordance with the Program's practices, procedures, and guidelines. She assists in the development of standards for program evaluation and makes recommendations for improving processes within her areas of responsibility. The appellant performs other routine duties such as social security number background checks and initial caseload tracking.

The nature of the appellant's work and the knowledge required to carry out the work do not fully meet the GS-6 level. The appellant's primary assigned work is focused on two different databases, dealing with two distinct research areas. The processes surrounding these areas are different, such

that the data is reported and coded for each in a different manner. The appellant handles problems and questions arising in the two research areas. This does not meet the GS-6 level where assignments involve a *wide* variety of assignments and work processes, whereby each area is subject to different sets of rules, regulations, and procedures. Also, the appellant's work is not characterized as unusually difficult and complicated, as at the GS-6 level.

Contrary to statements contained within the Complexity section of the appellant's PD, the appellant typically is not required to resolve "a wide variety of problems" or endure "unique problems and situations." The position typically does not perform statistical, data, and informational *analysis*, as stated under the Scope and Effect section of the appellant's PD.

Level of responsibility

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. 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.

At the GS-6 level, the supervisor reviews completed work for conformance with policy and requirements. The employee is recognized as an authority on processing transactions or completing assignments within a complicated framework of established procedures and guidelines, often when there are no clear precedents. Guidelines for the work are numerous and varied, making it difficult for the employee to choose the most appropriate instruction and decide how the various transactions are to be completed. Guidelines often do not apply directly, requiring the employee to make adaptations to cover new and unusual work situations. This may involve deviating from established procedures to process transactions which cannot be completed through regular channels or involve actions where guidelines are conflicting or unusable. Contacts are with employees in the agency, in other agencies, or with management or users or providers of agency services. The employee provides information, explains the application of regulations, or resolves problems relating to the assignment.

The level of responsibility of the appellant's position is equivalent to the GS-5 grade level. Her supervisor assigns work in terms of broadly defined functions, responsibilities, and missions. The appellant performs her work independently, solving most problems that arise during day-to-day work situations. Established guidelines cover most aspects of the appellant's work. She may have to expand or modify the guides in answering questions from the field or in dealing with problems. She

is involved in recommending additions and improvements to the current guidelines. Those problems or situations involving new, questionable, or unprecedented issues are referred to the supervisor or other staff member. The appellant's work is reviewed for technical accuracy, clarity, timeliness, and effectiveness in meeting objectives. She has regular contacts with Family Advocacy Program staff located at Air Force bases throughout the world and with other headquarters staff located within her organization. The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to obtain and clarify information, such as that concerned with obtaining missing information from a field site's data submission, and to assist the field staff by answering questions and explaining methods and procedures.

The level of responsibility of the appellant's position does not fully meet the GS-6 grade level. The appellant's work receives a closer review than that for only overall conformance with policy and requirements. The guidelines and operating procedures concerning the appellant's work are not considered a complicated framework of guides nor are they characterized as inapplicable, conflicting, or unusable. Instead, the established guidelines and procedures are more clear-cut and directly applicable than those at the GS-6 level.

Contrary to a statement in the Guidelines section of the appellant's PD, the appellant does not "exercise a high level of professional judgment" in determining how to accomplish objectives.

Summary

The two factors, nature of assignment and level of responsibility, are both evaluated at the GS-5 grade level. The overall grade level of the position is therefore GS-5.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly covered by the Miscellaneous Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-303, graded at the GS-5 level, and titled at the agency's discretion.