



## United States Office of Personnel Management

**Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness**  
*Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions*  
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**Standard:** [Entomology Series, GS-0414](#) (June 1964)  
**Factor:** N/A  
**Issue:** Distinguishing between professional and technical positions

### **Identification of the Classification Issue**

This issue arose in the Office of Personnel Management's consideration of a classification appeal. The appellant was an Entomologist in a research laboratory. The appellant served as a central point for coordinating the insect identifications made by research scientists in the laboratory and, in addition, personally made final identifications of those specimens for which a researcher was not responsible. The issue to be resolved was whether the appellant's duties required full professional skills and knowledge necessary for classification of the position in the Entomology Series, GS-0414.

### **Resolution**

The standard for the GS-0414 series provides specific criteria for distinguishing professional and technical work. In addition, there are succinct and more general definitions of professional and technical work in the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards (section III.C) and The Classifier's Handbook (chapter 4). The two kinds of work are distinguished as follows.

Professional work requires knowledge in a field of science or learning characteristically acquired through education or training equivalent to a bachelor's or higher degree with major study in or pertinent to the specialized field. Work is professional when it requires the exercise of discretion, judgment, and personal responsibility for the application of an organized body of knowledge that is constantly studied to make new discoveries and interpretations and to improve data, materials, and methods. Professional responsibility involves the ability to reason from existing knowledge to unexplored areas; to adapt methods to circumstances that deviate from the standards; and to stay

abreast of and evaluate technical subjects, analyses, and proposals in professional literature. It is also important to consider whether management has decided that the work is to be performed following accepted professional methods and practices.

Technical work is typically associated with and supportive of a professional or administrative field. It requires practical knowledge, gained through extensive experience and/or specific training less than that represented by college graduation. Work in technical occupations may involve substantial elements of the work of a professional field, but requires less than full knowledge of the field involved. Technical work requires the execution of tasks, methods, procedures, and/or computations that are laid out in either published or oral instructions and covered by established precedents or guidelines. Technical work is normally planned and managed by professional employees.

The Office of Personnel Management considered the following facts to arrive at a decision on the correct classification for the appellant's position.

1. Unlike typical technical positions, the appellant's work was not planned and managed by professional employees. The appellant was personally responsible for making independent final identifications for a variety of users of the laboratory's insect identification service, and these identifications did not require the review or approval of higher level researchers in the laboratory.
2. The appellant did not simply apply standard references in making insect identifications. Rather, many of the specimens received for identification were not covered by adequate references. The appellant was required to go beyond existing literature to identify specimens that were unknown to science.
3. The appellant kept abreast of the work of researchers in the laboratory and new literature in the field in order to apply current information to the identification of uncommon species. She used her own judgment in determining whether to seek the expertise of researchers when difficult specimens were encountered.
4. Management's intention in establishing the position was to create a fully professional position with specialized skills in insect taxonomy.
5. The appellant carried out her assignments on the basis of knowledge acquired through completion of the requirements for a college degree in entomology, rather than on the basis of extensive experience and on-the-job training.

After carefully considering the weight and influence of the above facts against the guidance in the GS-0414 standard and the more general criteria in the Introduction and the Handbook, The Office of Personnel Management concluded that the position was properly classified in the professional Entomology Series, GS-0414.