



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness

Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions

June 2000

Article No. 24-02

Standard: General Engineering, GS-801
Civil Engineering, GS-810 (June 1966)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Series coverage; selection of standards for grading

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose as a result of OPM's adjudication of a classification appeal. The appellant stated that the position included work in all aspects of facility management, including civil, electrical, mechanical, fire protection engineering, architecture, and landscape architecture. The appellant claimed that she should be assigned to the GS-801 series because: (1) someone with only civil engineering knowledge could not address the diversity of problems handled by the position; (2) no single engineering discipline predominated; and (3) the work in all disciplines was at the same level of skill and ability. Because of the multifaceted nature of the work, the appellant also claimed the General Grade Evaluation Guide for Nonsupervisory Engineering Positions (Guide) should be used for grade level analysis.

Resolution

OPM concluded that Civil Engineering, GS-810 work constituted the primary and paramount work of the position because it was the highest level of work performed and occupied a substantial amount of the appellant's time. OPM found that the appellant's other assignments, e.g., environmental engineering and landscape architecture, were ancillary to the position's civil engineering functions and were evaluable at lower grade levels than the GS-810 work. Therefore, the position did not meet the GS-801 series definition of engineering work, which includes positions that are not specifically classifiable in any other engineering series or that involve professional work in several branches of engineering. The classification system fully envisions

that engineers whose positions are classified to a specific engineering series may perform work in other engineering series. Therefore, OPM sustained allocation to the GS-810 series.

Both the agency and the appellant referred to the Guide for grading purposes. Because the GS-810 standard contains directly applicable criteria, OPM determined that the Guide could not be used as a grading tool. OPM also found that there were standards for related occupations, which covered the work that the appellant performed. Their specific, directly applicable criteria had to be applied for grade level analysis before the Guide could be used as a grading instrument.

Based on the underlying reason for the existence of the position, OPM found that Part II, Planning and Development, of the GS-810 standard provided the best criteria with which to analyze the grade level worth of the appellant's work. Instructions in the standard acknowledge that some positions contain functions that are included in more than one of the functional divisions. However, according to the standard, if one such function is clearly paramount, such a position should be evaluated against the criteria covering that function.

“Back to the Basics”

The series determination decision in this case involves the application of mixed grade and mixed series principles. By establishing that Civil Engineering, GS-810, was both the dominant and highest graded professional work performed, the position was excluded from the GS-801 series. It illustrates how decisions are made on what constitutes the primary and paramount work of a position.

Determining that the Guide was not necessary or appropriate for grade level determination purposes is based on the classification principle that specific, directly applicable standards must be used when they are available. If directly applicable standards are not available, the criteria selected as the basis for comparison must be as similar as possible to the position to be evaluated to limit the potential for misapplication.

Link to [C-0810-11-05](#)