



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
November 2000
Article No. 25-07

Standard: [Research Grade-Evaluation Guide \(June 1964\)](#)

Factor: N/A

Issues: Distinguishing between Degrees C, D and E

Identification of the Classification Issue

Two appellants were each responsible for conducting research in their respective specializations. Their positions were evaluated by reference to the Research Grade-Evaluation Guide (Guide). The Guide defines three degrees – A, C, and E – with point values of 2, 6, and 10, respectively for the first three factors and point values of 4, 12, and 20, respectively for the fourth factor. The standard allows for intermediate point values for B and D when a factor is determined to fall between the defined degrees. In both cases, the appellants disagreed with the agency determination of Degree C and believed that Degree D or E should be credited for one or more of the factors.

Resolution

Across the factors, Degree C describes a technically responsible scientist researching complex problems that are difficult to define and require unconventional or novel approaches and sophisticated research techniques. The research results in publishable contributions that answer important questions in the field and open significant avenues for further research. The work requires a high degree of originality to define a complex or elusive problem, to develop new methods and techniques, and to relate the results to other research. The researcher is a mature, competent scientist, recognized as a significant contributor to the field.

Degree E is distinguished by research in an area that has previously been unyielding to analysis or the solutions represent advances of great significance. Technical supervision is nominal and consultative. The researcher is expected to explore the most fruitful areas of research within the framework of agency objectives and priorities, taking full responsibility for formulating all the research plans and

interpreting the findings. The creative manner in which the scientist extends current theory or methodology or develops new theory or methodology is of marked importance to the scientific field, national economy, national defense, or health, etc.

The appellants believed that exceeding Degree C in any aspect merited credit for the factor at Degree D. However, OPM found that exceeding one of several aspects of Degree C was not sufficient to credit Degree D. Because one of the other criteria for the factor fell short of Degree C, OPM found this counterbalanced the one aspect that exceeded Degree C. Credit at Degree D could only be assigned when Degree E was approached but not entirely met and there were no other limiting aspects to consider. The decisions further explained that, while the Guide does not define “great significance,” such research would involve advances that go far beyond accounting for previously unexplained phenomena, opening significant avenues for further study, or contributing in an important way to validating or modifying scientific theory, which are fully credited at Degree C.

“Back to the Basics”

These decisions illustrate that, when applying narrative classification standards, an intervening level may be assigned only when the next higher defined level is approached but not entirely met and there are no other limiting aspects to consider. This is based on the fact that narrative factor level descriptions do not describe the ceiling or floor for a factor level. A position must substantially exceed the level defined before crediting at the next higher level can be considered. In addition, when one aspect of a factor level exceeds the defined level but another equally important aspect falls short of the defined level, the factor level is not exceeded.

Link to [C-0470-13-01](#), [C-0413-13-01](#)