

OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
MERIT SYSTEMS OVERSIGHT AND EFFECTIVENESS
DALLAS OVERSIGHT DIVISION
CLASSIFICATION APPEAL DECISION

Under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Position: Civil Engineer, GS-810-11
Position Number: 2041

Organization: Architecture and Engineering Group
[organizational name]
[agency component name]
Department of the Interior
[location]

Decision: Civil Engineer, GS-810-12
(Appeal Granted)

OPM decision number: C-0810-12-01

Approved by:

/s/ Bonnie J. Brandon
Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

4/10/97
Date

Copy of decision sent to:

[appellant's name and address]

[activity name, agency component, and location]

Director of Personnel
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

INTRODUCTION

The appealed position is assigned to the Architecture and Engineering Group, [activity name], [agency component and location]. The agency has classified the position as Civil Engineer, GS-810-11. The appellant believes the position description and the duties performed reflect a GS-12 grade level. He filed an appeal with this office under the provisions of chapter 51 of title 5, United States Code.

This is the final administrative decision of the Government, subject to discretionary review only under the conditions and time limits specified in sections 511.605 and 511.613 of the Code of Federal Regulations and appendix 4 of the Introduction to the Position Classification Standards.

POSITION INFORMATION

[activity's name] mission is to provide scientific and technical consultation and support to the [agency component] field offices. The Architecture and Engineering Group provides the technical expertise to assist [agency component] clients in the following: (1) development of design concepts, design criteria, design analyses, technical drawings, specifications, cost estimates, system requirements, operation and maintenance manuals; and (2) management and review of design projects accomplished by architectural/engineering firms required to fulfill the [agency component] mission. The Architecture and Engineering Group also brokers technical assistance among field units or from sources within or outside [agency component] as well as assisting field units which lack appropriate expertise to review large design/construction projects prepared by others. The individuals assigned within the Architecture and Engineering Group provide a pool of expertise in the disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture, space planning, interior designing, cartography, and engineering.

The appellant serves as point of contact and technical expert for field office personnel in [agency component]. He develops plans, conceptual designs, layouts, final designs, construction documents, specifications, cost estimates, and maintenance plans for complex projects in a wide variety of [agency component] facilities. The facilities include recreation facilities, transportation facilities, water treatment plants, water distribution systems, sewage treatment plants, and surface resource facilities. The appellant performs technical reviews of designs prepared by other designers at [activity name] and field offices. He inspects and reviews construction projects related to his program areas to monitor the quality of the work and its compliance with [agency component] standards, and he recommends changes or corrections to the work. He inspects and analyzes maintenance of [agency component] facilities and advises in the formulation of maintenance procedures and methods. The appellant develops and updates [agency component] guide specifications and standard drawings related to his program areas. He identifies training needs relating to the program areas, develops the course outline, arranges for facilities, and periodically conducts the training.

The duties of the appealed position require a knowledge of planning, surveying, design, and construction of recreation sites and facilities, transportation facilities, and surface resource facilities as it relates to program areas; mastery of advanced theories, principles, practices, and techniques of civil and sanitary engineering; ability to develop conceptual plans and designs for recreation sites and facilities; knowledge of contracting procedures for construction and for consultant services; and the ability to make written and oral presentations.

The appellant's position description is adequate for classification purposes.

SERIES AND TITLE DETERMINATION

The GS-810 Civil Engineering Series includes professional positions in the field of civil engineering, typically requiring application of general knowledge of the physical sciences and mathematics underlying engineering, and specialized knowledge of mechanics of solids, hydraulics, theory of structure, strength of materials, engineering geology, and surveying. The appellant does not dispute the series or title of his position, and we agree that the GS-810 series and Civil Engineer title are appropriate for the position.

GRADE LEVEL DETERMINATION

The Civil Engineering Series standard is comprised of four parts. Part II contains grade-level criteria for planning and design functions. Because the appellant's position is primarily concerned with the planning and design structures, Part II was used to grade this position. In Part II, grade levels are defined in terms of (1) the inherent complexity of planning and design problems assigned, and (2) the level of judgment and authority exercised. To indicate levels of complexity of planning and design problems in the grade-level descriptions, the standard uses the terms "conventional work" and "advanced work." Conventional work can be accomplished by applying or adapting standard references, criteria, and precedents. Advanced work requires searching out and selecting laws, formulas, principles, and materials and applying them to novel situations. The level of judgment and authority exercised is determined by (1) the kind and degree of supervision received; (2) the extent to which the employee must assess or identify the scope of the assignment and the methods used to complete the work; and (3) the extent of responsibility delegated with the work.

According to the standard, assignments received at the GS-11 level involve conventional work with general indications of results expected. The GS-11 engineer must identify the limits of the problems involved, the kinds of controlling data needed, and the criteria and techniques that will be applied in completing the assignment. Although the work is conventional, it often requires the engineer to select from several alternative approaches, or solutions to problems to determine the best way to complete the design. Some assignments require substantial adaptation of standardized guides and criteria. If there

are critical or overriding problems of (1) cost versus optimum technical solutions, (2) determining the priority of operational needs to be accommodated, or (3) responding to conflicting political or public interest pressures, the GS-11 engineer obtains guidance or decision from his supervisor or higher authority on selection of a course of action.

When the kinds of critical or overriding problems identified above arise, the appellant is empowered to resolve the problem(s) on his own. This kind of independence was exercised when he worked on the [name of site] Fish Barrier Project. The appellant was forced to work with existing designs that were sketchy and not based on established techniques or data. On his own, he developed design criteria by interviewing wildlife experts in [agency component], the Forest Service, and the [second agency component]. The appellant modified criteria developed for much larger streams and species of fish. The result was the establishment of new criteria and an unprecedented design for the structure. When working on the [name of site] Lake Project, the appellant determined that the standard criteria for the channel energy dissipator were developed for concrete construction, which was too expensive for the scope of the project. As a result of this determination, he modified the existing design techniques to apply alternative materials and construction techniques that were within the constraints of the budget allocated for this project. In addition, the appellant is contacted directly by personnel in the field for assistance. In those instances, he has the authority to scope out the issues without first consulting the supervisor. This level of judgment and authority exercised by the appellant exceeds the GS-11 level.

According to the standard, assignments at the GS-12 level typically include individual work on advanced planning or design problems, or responsibility for coordinating or monitoring planning and design work that is largely conventional in nature, but which encompasses a number of components or phases of project work. Assignments at this level deal with systems or facilities that (a) encompass a fairly wide range of interrelated elements some of which are conflicting and difficult to reconcile or accommodate, (b) pose critical problems of performance requirements versus costs under application of standard materials and criteria, or (c) require designs and plans which must deal with factors of an undetermined or unprecedented nature. The engineer at this level must engage in intensive search and study of the approaches applied and results obtained in similar situations, the findings of research and study on related problems, manufacturer's and laboratory reports on materials and equipment, or other similar sources of information. From such study, and from firsthand investigation and observations, the engineer extends or modifies existing criteria or techniques or develops new approaches to solutions of problems. In coordinating or monitoring planning and design efforts, the engineer develops schedules for orderly and timely accomplishment of work, arranges for obtaining data and information from outside sources, and advises other engineers on solutions to technical problems. The GS-12 engineer is expected to coordinate his or her efforts with those in other specialties to ensure compatibility of approach and optimum results. In addition, the engineer contacts other government agencies and

cooperation in carrying out investigations, to get their clearances, etc.

The appellant spends most of his time on assignments or projects involving recreational water distribution systems, and sewage treatment plants. Examples of the kinds of projects that the appellant has worked on and that were used to evaluate the grade of his site] Air Tanker Base; [name of site] Recreation Area Renovation; name of site] Visitor Contact Center; and the [name of site] Multiple Agency Center Vehicle Traffic. Some of described at the GS-12 level of the standard.

One of these projects, the [name of site] Air Tanker Base Project, required the appellant to research new processes and technologies so that they meet the requirements of constantly changing and stricter environmental controls. The project required the identification and development of solutions to several different problems with the facilities and operations. Conflicting elements of aircraft operations, filling and recovery operations, retardant containment and disposal, and personnel safety were not readily defined. As a result, the appellant had to study the situation and consult with local (city and county) environmental quality and airport operations authorities to define the scope of the problem and establish criteria for investigation and constraints on design. After thorough study and consultation, solutions to the problems identified were developed. The complexity of some of the projects are enhanced further since they are governed by local and State regulations and laws that vary extensively from one state to another.

The appellant's assignments include work on some advanced planning and design problems. For example, his work on the [name of site] Fish Barrier Project and the name of site] Air Tanker Base Project dealt with systems that contained or included a wide range of interrelated elements some of which were conflicting and difficult to reconcile or accommodate. He has done some research when working on the [name of site] Fish Barrier Project, the [name of site] Lake Recreation Area Renovation Project, and the [name of site] Air Tanker Base Project, which resulted in the appellant extending and modifying existing criteria or techniques and developing new approaches to solve problems.

As project leader for the [name of site] Recreation Area Renovation Project, the appellant coordinated the phases of project work. He negotiated the schedule for each of the phases of the project with the district office; established the design schedule for the other engineers, architects, and technicians involved with the project; acted as liaison between the field office personnel, designers, reviewers, drafters, specification writers, and district, State, and [agency component] managers; and coordinated the work between the various disciplines.

The appellant has contacts with other government agencies to obtain their cooperation and/or to get clearances. For example, the appellant made such contact with local (city [name of site] Air Tanker Base Project. He serves as the [agency component] expert on water, solar pumping, fire suppression, irrigation, and open channel hydraulic systems, technical problems. As part of a team approach, the appellant conducts peer reviews of work performed by other engineers to assure conformance to standard procedures and

When making assignments to the appellant, the supervisor indicated that he does not grade level. The appellant is responsible for planning and carrying out assignments

The appellant works independently and keeps his supervisor advised of problems for attainment of objectives and compliance with policies. This degree of considerable

DECISION

judgment and authority exercised evaluated at the GS-12 level, that grade represents the

Therefore, the proper title, series, and grade for the appealed position is Civil Engineer,