

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

Atlanta Oversight Division
75 Spring Street, SW., Suite 1018
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Classification Appeal Decision
Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code

Appellant: [appellant]

Agency classification: Computer Assistant
GS-335-7

Organization: Agricultural Research Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

OPM decision: Computer Assistant
GS-335-7

OPM decision number: C-0335-07-05

Virginia L. Magnuson
Classification Appeals Officer

8/1/02

Date

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

Decision sent to:

[appellant]

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Introduction

On April 14, 2002, the Atlanta Oversight Division of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted an appeal for the position of Computer Assistant, GS-335-7, Agricultural Research Service, [organization], U.S. Department of Agriculture, [location]. The appellant is requesting that her position be classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-8. We received the complete appeal administrative report from the agency on May 13, 2002.

We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112(b) of title 5, United States Code.

General issues

The agency reviewed the appellant's position in 2001 and changed the factor level credit for Factor 1 from Level 1-5 to 1-4. The appellant believes that additional responsibilities and duties in her position, added after the initial Level 1-5 determination, continue to support Level 1-5 credit.

The appellant spends the majority of her time performing systems administration support work and technical design for computer users in a networked computer environment. The additional responsibilities assigned to the appellant's position such as web development support and email server backups are performed less than 25 percent of the time. Only duties that occupy at least 25 percent of an employee's time can affect the grade of a position (*Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, section III.J). Therefore, we will not evaluate these duties in this decision.

The appellant states that the classification standard for the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, is outdated. However, the adequacy of grade-level criteria in OPM standards is not appealable (section 511.607 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations).

In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully reviewed all information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including information obtained from telephone interviews with the appellant and her immediate supervisor.

Position information

The appellant is assigned to position description number [#]. The appellant, supervisor, and the agency have certified the accuracy of the position description.

The appellant works in the [organization] at the [organization]. The [organization] is a joint USDA/ARS and [organization] unit. She provides computer services support for users at the Agricultural Research Service, the University, and the [organization]. The primary purpose of this position is to provide system administration support for networked and stand-alone computers running Windows NT, Windows 95/98 and other operating systems. The appellant's responsibilities include installing, maintaining and configuring the computers, servers and peripheral equipment; installing, configuring and testing system additions and upgrades; and identifying and resolving system administration and network connectivity problems. She has

primary responsibility for monitoring the overall network environment, operation and status, and providing local user support, training and general guidance on hardware and software issues and problems. The appellant also sets up user accounts, establishes access rights and passwords, and sets up and maintains data protection, backup and recovery procedures. She prepares presentations for users, as requested, using different graphics programs.

The appellant receives direct supervision from the Computer Specialist in charge of the [organization]. The supervisor sets objectives for non-recurring assignments and provides interpretation on new policies and procedures. The appellant identifies what needs to be done and independently plans and carries out assignments. Completed work is reviewed in terms of its effectiveness in meeting goals and objectives within established deadlines.

Series, title and standard determination

The appellant does not contest the title or series of her position. The agency determined the appellant's position is properly placed in the Computer Clerk and Assistant Series, GS-335, and titled as Computer Assistant. We concur with the agency's series and title determination.

The position is evaluated by comparing the duties and responsibilities to criteria contained in the GS-335 standard.

Grade determination

The GS-335 standard uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES), which employs nine factors. Under the FES, positions are evaluated on the basis of the duties, responsibilities, and the qualifications required in terms of nine factors common to non-supervisory General Schedule positions. A point value is assigned to each factor based on a comparison of the position's duties with the factor level descriptions in the standard. The factor point values mark the lower end of the ranges for the indicated factor level. For a position factor to warrant a given point value, it must be fully equivalent to the overall intent of the selected factor level description. If the position fails in any significant aspect to meet a particular factor level description in the standard, the point value for the next lower factor level must be assigned, unless the deficiency is balanced by an equally important aspect which meets a higher level. The total points assigned are converted to a grade by use of the grade conversion table in the standard.

Under FES, positions which significantly exceed the highest factor level or fail to meet the lowest factor level described in a classification standard may be evaluated by reference to the applicable factor level in the Primary Standard, contained in Appendix 3 of the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*. The Primary Standard is the "standard for standards" for the FES.

The appellant disagrees with the agency's evaluation of Factor 1 (Knowledge Required). After careful review of the record, we agree with the agency's determinations for all uncontested factors except Factor 7. Therefore, our analysis will discuss only Factors 1 and 7.

Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position

This factor measures the nature and extent of information or facts that the worker must understand to do acceptable work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts) and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply that knowledge. The agency credited Level 1-4. The appellant believes Level 1-5 is appropriate.

At Level 1-4, employees perform a wide range of preparing, advising, assisting, coding, and procedure-related problem solving duties using knowledge of computer procedures and processing methods. Work at this level involves knowledge used to assist programmers or other users or in scheduling, controlling, and problem-solving work.

Level 1-4 is met. The appellant performs a wide variety of duties associated with the usage of computer software and peripherals in a networked environment. She must be knowledgeable of a variety of computer operating systems to supply network support to users and knowledgeable of system peripherals such as printers, cards, drives, and other components associated with computers. The appellant resolves performance and speed problems; troubleshoots and resolves problems related to network hardware and software conflicts; and installs system upgrades (e.g., software, hard disks, CD-ROM drives, additional memory, network hardware, etc.). She assists users by advising them on system capabilities and how to meet their data needs. Because the appellant supports a system consisting of commercially available products that primarily use commercial off-the-shelf software, most of the problems encountered are recurring in nature and are generally resolved through the application of well-documented standard procedures and techniques.

At Level 1-5, employees carry out limited specialized projects using knowledge of fundamental data processing methods, practices, and techniques in work involving the development, test, implementation and modification of computer programs and operating procedures. They prepare programs or write new program documentation and operating procedures. At Level 1-5, employees use their knowledge as the basis for analysis and decision-making in several functional settings.

Level 1-5 is not met. Although the duties and responsibilities performed by the appellant require an understanding of various software programs, the work does not require the in-depth knowledge of systems and programs indicative of Level 1-5. She is primarily responsible for supporting the users of commercially available, standardized hardware and software. Her work requires knowledge of precedent and applicable manufacturer's installation, maintenance, repair and troubleshooting procedures. The appeal record contains no indications that the appellant's regular and recurring work requires Level 1-5 knowledge to develop, test, implement, or modify computer programs and operating procedures.

The appellant compares such duties as developing and testing procedures for migrating the computers, developing procedures for updating and delivering email address books, developing a web solution for scientists to deliver documents via the Internet, and modifying the existing website to Factor Level 1-5. Such procedures are not predominant duties and do not meet the intent listed in Factor Level 1-5.

Level 1-4 is credited for 550 points.

Factor 7, Purpose of contacts

This factor deals with the purpose of the contacts selected in Factor 6. The agency credited Level 7-1 for this factor. We disagree.

At Level 7-1, the purpose of contacts is to exchange factual information such as processing status, deadline for input submissions, tape or disk availability or condition and similar kinds of factual information, or to explain established work methods and processes. According to the record, the purpose of the appellant's contacts is to resolve software and hardware problems and exchange technical information with users and vendor representatives. This exceeds the factual exchange of information typical of Level 1-7.

At Level 7-2, the highest level described in the standard, the purpose of contacts is to plan or coordinate changes in scheduling requirements or priorities due to data or equipment related problems. Contacts at this level also include participation with users in planning and coordinating new or modified requirements or in planning user participation, methodology, and deadlines for new projects.

The appellant's contacts meet Level 7-2. She coordinates work. She resolves hardware/software problems and provides technical advice and assistance to users. She trains new and existing users on new or upgraded systems' hardware/software. The appellant also seeks and exchanges technical information with counterparts or computer specialists at higher levels in the agency. There is no indication in the record that the appellant's contacts exceed Level 7-2.

Level 7-2 is credited for 50 points.

Summary

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-4	550
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-3	150
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. Personal contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	5
<i>Total</i>		1485

A total of 1485 points falls in the GS-7 range (1355-1600). Therefore, in accordance with the grade conversion table in the GS-335 standard, the appellant's position is properly graded at GS-7.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as Computer Assistant, GS-335-7.