

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



Dallas Oversight Division
1100 Commerce Street, Room 4C22
Dallas, TX 75242

**Classification Appeal Decision
Under Section 5112 of Title 5, United States Code**

Appellant: [appellant's name]

Agency classification: Space Planner
GS-1001-11

Organization: [organization]
[the activity]
Bureau of Land Management
Department of Interior
[city and state]

OPM decision: GS-1008-11
title at agency discretion

OPM decision number: C-1008-11-01

Bonnie J. Brandon
Classification Appeals Officer

12/10/98

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's name and address]

Director
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Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
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Introduction

The Dallas Oversight Division of the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) received a classification appeal on July 17, 1998, from [the appellant]. Her position is currently classified as Space Planner, GS-1001-11. [the appellant] believes the position should be classified as Interior Designer, GS-1008-12. The position is assigned to the [small organization], [the activity], Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Interior, [city and state]. We have accepted and decided her appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code.

General issues

The appellant's official position description (PD) number is 02296. The appellant does not believe it is an accurate description of her work, although her current supervisor certified it as being correct. The appellant's former supervisor developed a new PD several years ago that he believed more accurately described the duties of the position. The proposed PD was for an Interior Designer, GS-1008-12. A specialist from the servicing personnel office conducted a desk audit and found the position to be classified as Space Planner, GS-1001-11. The specialist also concluded the proposed PD was not accurate for classification purposes and maintained the former PD as the official record. We reviewed both PD's and find that PD number 02296 is an accurate description of the appellant's position. While the proposed PD provides more detail, it emphasizes professional knowledge requirements that are inappropriate for the position.

To help decide this appeal, a representative of the Dallas Oversight Division conducted telephone interviews with the appellant, her former supervisor, and a member of the [organization] who served as an interim supervisor and is knowledgeable of the appellant's duties as currently being performed. In reaching our classification decision, we have carefully considered the information provided during the interviews and all information of record provided by the appellant and the agency.

Position information

The [organization] provides centralized engineering, architectural, and landscape architectural services to clients BLM-wide. The appellant supports this mission by providing technical expertise in the areas of space utilization and interior design of office buildings and recreational facilities. The space utilization and interior design duties are done as either distinct projects in the redesign of leased space or in conjunction with new construction or remodeling projects of BLM-owned buildings. The appellant's PD and other material of record furnish much more information about her duties and responsibilities and how they are performed.

Series and title determination

The appealed position was established to support engineers, architects, and interpretive specialists in the design and construction of interior environments. The primary goal of the appellant's work is to create an interior environment that promotes the health and welfare of employees and the general public in the most efficient and cost-effective manner for the agency. Work of this nature is classifiable to the GS-1000 Information and Arts Group. This group includes positions that require

artistic skill and ability, the ability to evaluate and interpret informational and cultural materials, or the practical application of technical or esthetic principles combined with manual skill and dexterity.

The agency classified the position to the GS-1001 General Arts and Information Series since it involved a combination of work characteristic of two series, and the grade controlling duties were those involving space utilization. Based on our review of all information obtained concerning this appeal, we find the work performed by the appellant to be covered by the GS-1008 Interior Design Series. Work in this series involves the design of interior environments in order to promote the health and welfare of employees and the public. Typical duties in this series include investigating, identifying, and documenting client needs, analyzing needs, proposing options, and working with the client to develop specific solutions; developing design documents, including contract working drawings and specifications; and managing design projects performed in-house or by contract. Work in this series requires knowledge from a variety of fields, such as: interior construction (i.e., building systems and components, building codes, equipment, materials, working drawings and specifications); contracting; facility operation (maintenance requirements, traffic patterns, security, and fire protection); esthetics; psychology of environmental effects; and project management. Both the space utilization and interior design aspects of the appellant's work incorporate these duties and require the knowledge described for this series.

OPM has prescribed no titles for positions in the Interior Design Series. Guidance in the *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards*, section III.H.2, states that agencies may select the official title of positions in series for which OPM has not prescribed titles. In doing so, agencies should consider constructing a title that is short, meaningful, and generally descriptive of the work performed. We recommend the title of Interior Designer.

Guide determination

There is no published standard for the GS-1008 Series. Therefore, a classification standard or guide for related kinds of work must be selected for grade determination. The standard or guide selected for comparison should be similar with respect to the work processes or subject matter of the work performed, the qualifications required to do the work, the level of difficulty and responsibility, and the combination of classification factors that have the greatest influence on the grade level. After reviewing several different standards and guides, we find that the Grade-Evaluation Guide for Visual Arts Work best meets these criteria. The Guide assesses assignments involving the design of visual products, with emphasis on originality, developing the design, and deciding the specific content of a visual product.

Grade determination

The Grade-Evaluation Guide for Visual Arts Work uses the Factor Evaluation System (FES), which employs nine factors. Under the FES, each factor level description describes the minimum characteristics needed to receive credit for the described level. Therefore, if a position fails to meet the criteria in a factor level description in any significant aspect, it must be credited at a lower level.

Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level. Our evaluation with respect to the nine FES factors follows.

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 and the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply these knowledges. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

The appellant uses her knowledge of the concepts, principles, and practices of space utilization and interior design to meet with clients and make site surveys to gather data on design intent and requirements. Applying this knowledge, the appellant prepares the original layout plans or design concepts, including drawings, specifications and cost estimates. The appellant is responsible for completing assigned projects from conception to completion within specified budget constraints. The appellant determines furniture, furnishings, and equipment requirements for space utilization projects and selects colors, finish materials, signage, and artwork for interior design projects. The appellant designs custom cabinetry and furniture to meet specific needs and requirements. The appellant inspects space during renovation or construction to ensure the design intent and serves as contracting officer's representative between the contractor and requesting office as needed. The appellant participates in the final inspection of completed work and is responsible for the final acceptance of space and design features. As assigned, the appellant reviews contract documents prepared by BLM or other Federal agencies for accuracy, completeness, and conformance with requirements and guidelines. The appellant prepares and updates BLM standards and guidelines in the areas of space utilization and interior design.

Level 1-7 is the highest level described in the Guide. At this level, subject matter knowledge is thorough enough to develop original designs or concepts or to transform descriptions of items into visual representations without the benefit of existing models or diagrams. Illustrations in the Guide describe situations in which an employee meets with the client to learn the objectives of a project and applies knowledge of the techniques, materials, and subject matter to translate the desired concept into a visual design. The employee at this level makes the initial decisions on size, layout, kind and quality of materials, color schemes, lighting effects, and specific visual elements or materials to be used. Projects at this level may include the fabrication of unique exhibits and often are of such a scale that the employee coordinates and evaluates the work of other specialists and outside organizations responsible for design and production. The knowledge exercised by the appellant fully meets and does not exceed Level 1-7.

A total of 1250 points is assigned to this factor.

Factor 2, Supervisory controls

This factor covers the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the employee's responsibility, and the review of completed work.

The appellant is a member of a design team and works under the direction of an architect or project team leader. She receives her assignments in terms of the overall purpose and objectives of the project to be completed. The appellant independently completes the space utilization and interior design components of projects, consulting with other team members on possible impact, integration, or compatibility issues concerning electrical, mechanical, or structural features. Completed work is reviewed for responsiveness to the assignment and conformance with agency and BLM policies.

The degree of supervisory controls exercised over the appellant is fully compatible with and does not exceed Level 2-4, the highest level described in the Guide. The employee at this level is given only broad objectives and resource limitations for a project. After consulting with the supervisor or client to develop specific ideas on the desired outcome, the employee independently plans and carries out the projects and resolves most differences of opinion with clients or contractors. The employee coordinates the work with clients, contractors, and others such as project team members. Completed work is reviewed only in terms of its effectiveness in meeting the overall objectives of the project.

This factor is evaluated at Level 2-4, and 450 points are credited.

Factor 3, Guidelines

This factor covers the nature of guidelines used in doing the work and the judgment that is needed to apply them.

Guidelines available to the appellant include Department, BLM, and General Services Administration regulations and specifications, Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards, Americans with Disabilities Act, books, periodicals, journals, catalogs, requirements provided by clients or requesting offices, and architectural designs developed by design team architects. The guidelines are limited in that they do not address all situations encountered by the appellant, and she must exercise judgment and creativity in departing from past approaches and adapting the guidelines to fit the assignment.

At Level 3-3, guidelines consist of examples of previous similar, but not identical, projects done for the organization or products found in books, magazines, or other materials provided by clients. The employee at this level uses judgment in transforming these ideas and materials into finished products that achieve the desired purpose and effect. The employee is expected to recognize where guidelines must be adapted and how they should be adapted. We find that the guidelines available to the appellant and the judgment exercised in applying them somewhat exceed this level but do not fully meet the next higher level.

At Level 3-4, the subject matter is either novel or vague. Because of this, guidelines are scarce or of limited use. Guides that do exist consist of rough sketches or simplistic diagrams. The employee uses initiative and resourcefulness in researching the subject matter to be depicted, searching for appropriate visual elements, or testing new materials and methods to use in creating a visual product. We found no indication that the appellant's assignments are so novel or vague that guidelines are as indistinct as envisioned at Level 3-4. For many assignments, the appellant has available to her master

specifications that can be used as boilerplates, as well as a variety of publications that can be used for research (as depicted at Level 3-3). She also has available to her guidance and assistance from architects, interpretive specialists, and other members of the design team.

Because Level 3-4 is not fully met, Level 3-3 is credited for 275 points.

Factor 4, Complexity

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

The appellant's work assignments involve a variety of space utilization and interior design services, ranging from minor to broad in scope. The assignments can involve a variety of complex issues that require the appellant to be versatile and innovative in adapting and modifying precedents, methods, and techniques. The appellant makes decisions as to design intent and identifies sources for products that are not readily available through normal channels. Because assignments may involve a myriad of factors, different approaches must be used in completing assignments.

The complexity of the appellant's assignments matches Level 4-4. Work at this level involves varied projects requiring the application of a wide range of methods, techniques, or materials. The projects are conventional, but no format or visual style has been specified. The employee visually interprets the subject matter to be depicted, with emphasis on planning, research, and collaboration with persons knowledgeable in the subject matter to be depicted. The employee makes decisions on how best to present subject matter information, to include assessing whether there is sufficient material available and identifying possible sources of additional needed material. Projects typically require departing from past approaches in order to create a new visual effect.

Although the appellant's assignments are not always conventional in nature, we do not find that her projects typically involve novel or abstract features such as those as intended at Level 4-5. Features typically dealt with at this level involve newly conceived technology, newly observed natural phenomenon, broad concepts or ideas as opposed to specific events or processes, multiplicity of subject matter themes, or diversity in the levels of knowledge or interest among the intended audience. While some of her projects involve unique design features, this does not equate to the obscure or theoretical nature of assignments described at Level 4-5.

Level 4-4 is assigned to this factor, and 225 points are assigned.

Factor 5, Scope and Effect

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the work and the effect of the work products or services both within and outside the organization.

As mentioned previously, the purpose of the appellant's work is to create an interior environment that promotes the health and welfare of employees and the general public in the most efficient and cost-effective manner for the agency. The appellant's work affects how BLM is perceived by the public and outside interests, the health and safety of building inhabitants, and the agency's budget.

Level 5-3 best reflects the scope and effect of the appellant's work. At this level, the purpose of the work is to plan the details of developing a variety of conventional visual products. The work products support and affect the adequacy of public information, training, developing technical publications, or conducting relations with professional communities associated with the work of the organization.

Level 5-4 is not met in that the appellant's assignments are not characterized by their novelty or unusual scale as previously addressed in this decision. In addition, her work does not affect a wide range of activities both within and outside the Department to the extent envisioned at Level 5-4.

Level 5-3 is assigned to this factor, and 150 points are credited.

Factors 6 and 7, Personal Contacts and Purpose of Contacts

These factors consider face-to-face and telephone contacts with persons not in the supervisory chain and the purpose of these contacts. These two factors are evaluated separately, but combined for the purpose of arriving at a total point value.

Persons Contacted

The appellant has contacts with individuals both within and outside the agency, to include members of industry, professional organizations, and architectural and engineering firms. Contacts are ad hoc in nature. Such contacts are comparable to Level 3 described in the Guide. Contacts at this level are with individuals or groups outside the agency on matters for which there is no routine working relationship already established.

Purpose of Contacts

The purpose of the appellant's contacts is to influence or persuade clients on design concepts, to provide technical assistance, to develop factual data, and to resolve technical problems and differences. Contacts of this nature match Level b in the Guide, which are for the purpose of planning, coordinating, or advising on work efforts or resolve technical problems by influencing individuals or groups.

Combining both factors (6-3 and 7-b) results in a total of 110 points.

Factor 8, Physical Demands

This factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the employee by the work assignments. This includes physical characteristics and abilities and the physical exertion involved in the work.

The appellant's work is mostly sedentary and accomplished in an office with little physical demands. Four to five one-week field trips in a year are made to inspect facilities. These trips involve travel, walking, bending, and climbing. While these trips involve some physical exertion, we do not view this as physically demanding to the extent described at Level 8-2. Work at this level involves long periods of standing or recurring lifting of moderately heavy items. Physical demands as depicted at Level 8-2 are not a regular and recurring part of the appellant's assignments.

Level 8-1 is assigned to this factor, and 5 points are assigned.

Factor 9, Work Environment

This factor covers the risks and discomforts in the physical surroundings and the safety precautions needed.

Most of the appellant's work is performed in an office setting, with some travel to and work at field sites to inspect facilities. Field work may involve working in close, confined spaces for short periods and exposure to varying temperatures. This is comparable to Level 9-1. Level 9-2 involves regular and ongoing exposure to moderate risks or discomforts, such as working with power tools or irritant or hazardous substances. Work at this level may require special safety precautions and the use of protective masks, gowns, goggles, gloves, or boots. These are not regular and recurring aspects of the appellant's assignments.

This factor is evaluated at Level 9-1, and 5 points are assigned.

Summary

In sum, we have evaluated the appellant's position as follows:

Factor	Level	Points
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-7	1250
2. Supervisory controls	2-4	450
3. Guidelines	3-3	275
4. Complexity	4-4	225
5. Scope and effect	5-3	150
6. Personal contacts and	6-3	
7. Purpose of contacts	7-b	110

The appellant's position warrants 2470 total points. In accordance with the grade conversion table found in the Guide, the position is properly graded at GS-11.

Decision

The appellant's position is properly classified as GS-1008-11, with the title at the discretion of the agency.

Since this decision changes the classification of the appealed position, it is to be effective no later than the beginning of the fourth pay period after the date of this decision (5 CFR 511.702). The servicing personnel office must submit a compliance report containing the corrected position description and a Standard Form 50 showing the personnel action taken. The report must be submitted within 30 days from the effective date of the personnel action.