

U.S. Office of Personnel Management  
Division for Human Capital Leadership & Merit System Accountability  
Classification Appeals Program

Dallas Field Services Group  
Plaza of the Americas, North Tower  
700 North Pearl Street, Suite 525  
Dallas, TX 75201

**Classification Appeal Decision**  
**Under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code**

**Appellant:** [appellant]

**Agency classification:** Secretary (Office Automation)  
GS-318-5

**Organization:** [number] Air Intelligence Squadron  
[number] Air Force Headquarters  
Air Combat Command  
U.S. Department of the Air Force  
[location]

**OPM decision:** Secretary (Office Automation)  
GS-318-5

**OPM decision number:** C-0318-05-12

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Robert D. Hendler  
Classification and Pay Claims  
Program Manager

September 28, 2005

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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]

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## **Introduction**

The Dallas Field Services Group of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) accepted a classification appeal on June 21, 2005, from [appellant] whose position is currently classified as a Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5. She believes her position should be classified at the GS-6 grade level. The position is assigned to the [number] Air Intelligence Squadron, [number] Air Force Headquarters, Air Combat Command, U.S. Department of the Air Force, at [location]. We received the agency's administrative report on July 22, 2005. We have accepted and decided this appeal under section 5112 of title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.).

## **Background**

The previous Squadron Commander requested a review of the appellant's position in October 2004. He cited additional duties and responsibilities resulting from the growth in the organization's staffing from 8 to 80. The local Human Resources Office reviewed the position and determined the classification was unchanged. The appellant was assigned to a new Standard Core Personnel Document (SCPD also known as position description (PD)) on June 26, 2005.

## **General issues**

The appellant states that her position warrants an upgrade to the GS-6 grade level because the increase in the size of the organization has increased her level of responsibility and her workload. In addition, she performs support duties and responsibilities for the [number] Air Force Headquarters' Lieutenant and Brigadier Generals in the absence of their secretaries. However, according to *The Classifier's Handbook*, chapter 5, neither volume of work nor duties performed in another employee's absence can be considered in determining the grade of a position.

By law, we must make that decision solely by comparing his current duties and responsibilities to OPM standards and guidelines (5 U.S.C. 5106, 5107, and 5112). Therefore, we have considered the appellant's statements only insofar as they are relevant to making that comparison.

## **Position information**

The appellant performs a variety of procedural and administrative duties to support the Commander and the squadron's seven subordinate offices in executing a full spectrum of intelligence activities. As of January 2005, the squadron had a total of 74 authorized positions: 19 officers, 50 enlisted service members and 5 civilians, including the appellant. Specifically, the appellant screens and directs all visitors, phone calls and incoming correspondence to the appropriate staff. She independently responds to routine or non-technical inquiries regarding administrative issues relating to travel, military protocol and office communications. The appellant may direct the flow of information between the immediate office and the subordinate units by initiating either written or oral communication relating to various administrative areas.

The appellant maintains the Commander's personal calendar and schedule, ensuring priority appointments and meetings are kept and no conflicts arise. She monitors the calendars of headquarters officials to alert the Commander of important meetings and any scheduling changes. The appellant also responds to invitations and requests for appointments, meetings and

interviews directed to the Commander. She plans and coordinates administrative arrangements for meetings, as well as the occasional conference and ceremony. The appellant may also meet, greet and prepare for the arrival of distinguished visitors.

In addition, the appellant receives, reviews, edits and tracks various documents regarding such things as awards, decorations and performance reviews, primarily for the Squadron Commander's signature. She identifies problems with incomplete information on administrative paperwork submitted to her by the subordinate units. The appellant reviews and edits performance reviews for officers, enlisted service members and civilian employees to ensure documents are not only complete but also formatted accurately and include only information substantiated by the individual's personnel file.

The appellant is currently assigned to SCPD number [number]. The Acting Commander indicated in an e-mail, dated July 12, 2005, that the SCPD failed to reflect the impact of the expanded roles and duties of the Squadron Commander on the appellant's contacts with high ranking military officials from various military units in screening and directing telephone calls to the Commander. He also stated that she handles classified/sensitive information on a regular basis and works inside a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility. As a result, he did not certify to the accuracy of the duties described in the SCPD.

A PD is the official record of the major duties and responsibilities assigned to a position by a responsible management official, i.e., a person with authority to assign work to a position. A position is the duties and responsibilities that make up the work performed by an employee. Classification appeal regulations permit OPM to investigate or audit a position and decide an appeal on the basis of the duties assigned by management and performed by the employee. We classify a real operating position and not simply the PD.

To help decide this appeal, we conducted telephone audits with the appellant on August 22 and 25, 2005, and a telephone interview with the new Squadron Commander on September 21, 2005. Since the Squadron Commander entered on duty July 22, 2005, we also interviewed the previous Acting Commander on September 19, 2005, who was acting as the Squadron Commander when the classification appeal to OPM was first initiated and has first-hand knowledge of the appellant's work. In reaching our classification decision, we carefully considered all of the information gained from these interviews, as well as the written information furnished by the appellant and her agency, including the SCPD. We find this SCPD does contain the major duties and responsibilities assigned to and performed by the appellant and we hereby incorporate it by reference into this decision.

### **Series, title, and standard determination**

The appellant does not dispute the agency's determination of the series and title of her position. We agree that the position is properly classified in the Secretary Series, GS-318. Consistent with the series determination, the proper title for the appellant's position is Secretary.

The position requires proficiency in the use of computer software, automated word processing office equipment and the skills of a qualified typist to perform office automation duties. As prescribed by the titling instructions of the Office Automation Grade Evaluation Guide, the full title of the appellant's position is Secretary (Office Automation). We applied this Guide to the

appellant's office automation work and determined that those duties and responsibilities are lower graded than her secretarial work. Since the office automation duties are not grade-controlling, we will not discuss them further. The appellant's position is properly graded using the position classification standard (PCS) for the Secretary Series, GS-318.

### **Grade determination**

The GS-318 standard is written in the Factor Evaluation System (FES) format, which uses nine factors. Each factor is evaluated separately and is assigned a point value consistent with the factor level definitions described in the standard. The total number of points for all nine factors is converted to a grade by use of the standard's grade conversion table. 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 the next lower level. Conversely, the position may exceed those criteria in some aspects and still not be credited at a higher level.

The appellant disagrees only with the agency's evaluation of Factor 1. We reviewed the agency's determination for Factors 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, and concur with their findings. Consequently, our evaluation will address only Factor 1 in detail.

#### *Factor 1, Knowledge required by the position*

This factor is expressed in terms of two elements, Knowledge Type and Work Situation. Knowledge Type measures the nature and extent of information the employee must understand in order to do the work, as well as the skills needed to apply that knowledge. Work Situation refers to the complexity of the organization served (e.g., the immediate office in which the secretary works and any subordinate offices) that affects the extent of office rules, procedures, operations and priorities the employee must apply to maintain a proper and smooth flow of work within the organization and between organizations.

#### *Knowledge Type*

In addition to Type II knowledges, positions at Knowledge Type III require knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies, and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments such as: independently noting and following-up on commitments made at meetings and conferences by staff members; shifting clerical staff in subordinate offices to take care of fluctuating workloads; or locating and summarizing information from files and documents when this requires recognizing which information is or is not relevant to the problem at hand. They require knowledge of an extensive body of rules, procedures or operations applied to clerical assignments; knowledge of the organization and functions of the office; and knowledge of the duties, priorities, commitments, policies and program goals of the staff sufficient to perform non-routine assignments. Secretaries at this level are fully responsible for coordinating the work of the office with other offices and for recognizing the need for such coordination in various circumstances.

In addition to the knowledge and skills required at lower levels, Knowledge Type IV requires a basic foundation of administrative concepts, principles and practices sufficient to independently perform such duties as eliminating conflict and duplication in extensive office procedures,

determining when new procedures are needed and studying and recommending restructuring of clerical activities for the office and subordinate offices. This level also requires a comprehensive knowledge of the supervisor's policies and views on all significant matters affecting the organization. Knowledge Type IV is generally supported by very large organizations, where the supervisor has a sizable staff and a significant subordinate structure equivalent to Work Situation B or C. The PCS states that Work Situation A does not permit application of Knowledge Type IV, and Work Situation B rarely involves application of Knowledge Type IV.

The appellant's position meets Knowledge Type III. Consistent with this level, the appellant must know the policies and priorities of the supervisor and staff in order to handle the administrative matters that arise and to coordinate with the work of other units, e.g., in arranging meetings, conveying information and ensuring timeliness of reports. She is responsible for scheduling and recording appointments, meetings, projects, trips and other relevant information, as required. Equivalent to the Knowledge Type III level, the appellant possesses considerable understanding of the squadron's functions, procedures and programmatic goals in order to control and distribute the mail, refer telephone calls and visitors and provide general, non-technical information. She also uses this knowledge in her day-to-day work to review military progress and performance reports for format, completeness and accuracy. The appellant must have knowledge of grammar, spelling, punctuation and required agency formats to prepare a variety of documents on awards, decorations, performance and retirement.

The appellant's position does not meet Knowledge Type IV. At this level, the secretary routinely uses knowledge of policies and procedures to adapt them to emergency situations and to recognize how and when policies, procedures and guidelines would be confusing to others. This level of knowledge is not required of the appellant's position. The appellant does not develop or change procedures, study and evaluate equipment or regularly brief staff or people outside the organization on the supervisor's views on current issues facing the organization. While the appellant may be knowledgeable of the supervisor's policies and views, she does not have the technical knowledge to perform the scope and complexity of duties, such as developing presentation material for the Commander's use or in briefing visitors, as expected at the Knowledge Type IV level. In addition, the appellant does not independently apply administrative practices to eliminate either conflict or streamline extensive office procedures since her role is more of a coordination function. The appellant may resolve scheduling conflicts, but her work typically requires keeping the Commander informed of situations rather than independently resolving problems.

#### *Work Situation*

Work Situation A covers organizations that are small and of limited complexity. Although these organizations may include several subordinate sections, the supervisor directs the staff primarily through face-to-face meetings, while internal procedural and administrative controls are simple and informal.

In Work Situation B, the staff is organized into subordinate segments, which may in turn be further divided. Direction of the staff is exercised through immediate supervisors and the subordinate groups differ in such aspects as subject matter, functions, relationships with other organizations and administrative requirements in ways that place demands on the secretary that are significantly greater than those described in Work Situation A. In Work Situation B, there is

a system of formal procedures and administrative controls as well as a formal production or progress reporting system.

The appellant's organization approaches Work Situation B, in that the squadron's workforce, which fluctuates significantly, is currently composed of approximately 85 to 90 staff members. The squadron is subdivided into seven subordinate units responsible for intelligence collection, threat analysis, targeting, readiness, special security, unit support and exploitation. The subordinate units are structured to ensure the effective and efficient flow of intelligence activities. For example, a unit reconnoiters for intelligence, which is then analyzed by another unit and, again, forwarded to a different unit to determine if the information gathered is severe enough to warrant taking further action. Meanwhile, another unit provides the squadron with training in various areas to ensure they are prepared for engagement. One unit cannot function without the other, and a collapse in one group would impede the work of most, if not all, of the remaining units. For intelligence activities to flow seamlessly, each unit performs work in support of the larger effort which indicates that the squadron's subordinate groups, in contrast with Work Situation B, have similar subject matters and functions.

The most important consideration in determining Work Situation is the manner in which the organizational environment impacts upon and influences the complexity and responsibility of the appellant's position. Although the squadron is divided into subordinate units, the organization does not significantly impact the appellant's work in the sense of imposing additional knowledge requirements on the job or requiring her to establish formal administrative controls between the organization and outside parties. The appellant indicates that coordination is accomplished by telephone or electronic mail with Command staff secretaries or staff members. In addition, the support provided by the appellant to one unit is the same type and level of support given to the remaining groups. The recipients vary but the courses of action do not. Therefore, having an organization subdivided into seven segments does not increase the level of complexity within the appellant's position. As in Work Situation A, the squadron, considering the extremely confidential nature of their work, is autonomous and does not function with the type of external direction and coordination that would increase the appellant's level of responsibility.

The GS-318 PCS includes several benchmark descriptions for positions at varying grade levels that serve as illustrative work situations. They describe the duties performed and the factor level assignments. Illustrations where Work Situation B is assigned are as follows:

- (1) The Division has a formalized system of internal procedures including extensive reporting requirements. Coordination of the subordinate units and projects is difficult to maintain. The Division includes 95 positions performing research and development work in three branches. Each branch is further subdivided. The Division plans, formulates, manages and executes advanced development programs in the areas of electric propulsion, non-propulsion power for flight vehicles and power for extraterrestrial sites.
- (2) The Audit Division includes several hundred employees and is divided into branches which are, in turn, divided into subordinate units. The Division has a complex set of formal internal procedures.
- (3) The Division is divided into 17 professional services, each of which may be further subdivided. The Division has extensive internal procedures and reporting systems.

- (4) The Laboratory includes 450 employees in four offices and five divisions. The divisions are subdivided into two to four branches which are, in turn, subdivided. The Commander directs the work of the Laboratory through approximately 50 subordinate supervisors, and formal policies, procedures and reporting requirements are necessary. The Laboratory is responsible for numerous research and development projects in the areas of advanced propulsion, fuels and lubricants, flight vehicle power, site support power and associated areas.

Benchmarks are intended as general guides. While the organization supported by the appellant approaches the size of those at Work Situation B, it does not involve the same level of organizational complexity and does it require the level of coordination and formal controls exercised in the Work Situation B illustrations. The high sensitivity of the closely related functions and involvement of military personnel in tracking suspenses serve to limit the appellant's responsibilities in this area. The position is appropriately credited with Work Situation A.

A combination of Knowledge Type III and Work Situation A equates to Level 1-3 and 350 points are assigned.

#### *Summary*

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Points</i>
1. Knowledge required by the position	1-3	350
2. Supervisory controls	2-3	275
3. Guidelines	3-2	125
4. Complexity	4-2	75
5. Scope and effect	5-2	75
6. Personal contacts	6-2	25
7. Purpose of contacts	7-2	50
8. Physical demands	8-1	5
9. Work environment	9-1	<u>5</u>
<i>Total points</i>		985

The point total of 985 falls with the GS-5 grade level point range of 855 – 1,100 points on the Grade Conversion Table.

#### **Decision**

The position is properly classified as Secretary (Office Automation), GS-318-5.