
Information on ARS Supergrade Panels

Background

This summary provides essential information about the ARS Supergrade Panel process.

Context

- because ARS has no delegated authority to classify positions above GS-15, our Supergrade Panel only makes a *recommendation* to USDA; USDA and OPM are the approval echelons
- ARS is typically allocated 30+/- ST slots, which revert to USDA control when vacated
- ARS researchers scored above GS-15 by the ARS Supergrade Panel go to the end of a queue to wait for a slot to open up

Supergrade Panel Philosophy/Criteria

- to ensure ARS submits only "world class" scientists for USDA/OPM approval, the Supergrade Panel takes an intentionally conservative approach in evaluating GS-15 researchers
 - regular panels and AD's are also instructed to take a conservative approach and not refer cases lightly (see February 2005 AA memo) [<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes/Referral-Policy.pdf>]
- the Supergrade Panel is not inclined to "give the benefit of the doubt"
- it focuses almost exclusively on RGEF Factor IV's "In Excess of Degree E" level
- it will **not** recommend for ST with a score like 12+12+12+20 (Factor IV low)
- **all four** of the Factor IV "In Excess of Degree E" criteria listed below must be met, or the case must be so strong in three as to offset weakness in a fourth
 - has received honors/awards from major national organizations for accomplishments
 - is sought as advisor and consultant on scientific and technological programs/problems well beyond own field
 - serves as recruiting attraction for recent graduates (or visiting scientists)
 - personal competence is a major consideration in agency sponsorship of programs in his/her field

- these criteria make it clear that scoring at ST is **not** based on "just more GS-15 stuff"
- scientists submitting cases to the Supergrade Panel must complete a special form (ARS-229) [http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes/rpes_forms.htm] addressing RGEG Factor IV "In Excess of Degree E Criteria"
- the ST pay system is explained in P&P 451.7-ARS [<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/451-07-ars.HTM>]
- ARS policy values "In Excess of Degree E" at 12 points in Factors I-III, and 24 points in Factor IV)
 - the maximum credit a Supergrade Panel can assign is therefore 60 point
 - the former ST Pay Bands I-III have been eliminated by statutory change
- Supergrade Panels review ST positions as a position classification maintenance function, i.e., the panel will either confirm an incumbent's continued impact above GS-15 or render a Grade/Category Problem (GCP) decision
 - it is essential that ST scientists carefully document *recency*, both since they became ST and since their last Supergrade Panel review (if any)
 - recency must be reflected in Demonstrated Accomplishments in Factor IV of the case writeup, and in all or most sections of the AD-229

Supergrade Panel Composition

- policy set by P&P 431.3-ARS, Section 9
- those serving on the panel are themselves ST's, SES, or Chairs of regular RPES panels
- panelist peer group and scientific discipline are less significant than on regular panels

(2/05)