



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness

Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions

November 2000

Article No. 25-03

Standards: [General Biological Science, GS-401](#)
[General Physical Science, GS-1301 \(August 1971\)](#)
[Ecology, GS-408 \(June 1977\)](#)

Factor: N/A

Issue: Interdisciplinary professional positions; series determination

Identification of the Classification Issue

The appellant was a senior science and education advisor for an organization recognized as a leader in environmental research and management. The appellant administered a broad range of science and research initiatives relating to endangered species, biodiversity, wetlands restoration and banking, forest operations, short rotation woody crops, and phyto-remediation of wastes.

The agency determined that the position was an interdisciplinary professional position involving duties and responsibilities closely related to more than one professional occupation. The nature of the work was such that a person with education and experience in biological sciences (GS-401), physical sciences (GS-1301), or ecology (GS-408) would be considered equally well qualified. Because of the appellant's educational background, the agency placed the position in the GS-401 series. The appellant believed the position should be classified as Research Ecologist in the GS-408 series because of the nature of the work and the fact that the position had previously been classified in that series.

Resolution

An interdisciplinary professional position involves duties and responsibilities closely related to more than one *professional* occupation. Generally, they fall into one of two categories. The first is positions that involve a combination of knowledge characteristic of two or more professional series,

i.e., some duties are characteristic of one profession and other duties are characteristic of another profession. The second is positions that involve knowledge characteristic of *either* of two or more professional series, i.e., the work is substantially identical to work performed in either of the professional occupations or academic disciplines involved.

In the case of an interdisciplinary professional position, the final classification of the position is determined by the qualifications of the person selected to fill it. While the position had previously been classified in the GS-408 series, that determination was made on the basis of the qualifications of the former incumbent. The appellant's education was in the fields of forest science, botany, tree physiology, and soil nutrition. The General Biological Sciences Series, GS-401, includes professional work in biology, agriculture, or related natural resource management. The agency determined that the GS-401 series was appropriate for the appellant's position based on his qualifications, and OPM agreed.

“Back to the Basics”

The *Introduction to the Position Classification Standards* limits the use of interdisciplinary positions to professional positions that can be filled by candidates with professional background in two or more professional occupations. While the position could have been placed in the GS-408 series, the appellant lacked the background for placement in that series. Final classification of the position had to be based on the qualifications of the current incumbent, resulting in its placement in the GS-401 series.

Link to [C-0401-11-01](#)