

Federal Human Resources Employment Trends

**An Occupation in Transition
A Comprehensive Study of the Federal
Human Resources Community**

PART 1

**United States Office of
Personnel Management**

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Federal HR: An Occupation in Transition 1969-1998

In recent years, the Federal Human Resources (HR) workforce has come under close scrutiny. HR professionals are increasingly being asked to provide better customer service and to serve more as strategic partners with agency management, while continuing to maintain the integrity of the traditional HR processes. Playing this expanded role would be a tall order under any circumstances, even if HR's capacity to respond to new challenges had not been undercut by the substantial downsizing taking place during the 1990's. Small wonder there is concern about whether HR has the capacity left to fulfill its old responsibilities *and* take on new ones.

This report is the first installment of a larger Office of Personnel Management (OPM) study which will address these issues. Using data from the Central Personnel Data Files (CPDF), it lays the groundwork for the remainder of the study by establishing a current statistical profile of the Federal HR profession. It also compares the profile with past data to identify significant trends in the occupation.

The study will produce two further reports. The next report will review competencies needed by HR professionals today and in the future. It will draw on private sector experience as well as competency models devised for the Federal sector in particular. The third and final installment will be a summary report addressing the following broad questions:

- 1) What competencies are held today by Federal HR professionals?
- 2) What will be needed in the future?
- 3) How do we get there from here?

TRENDS IN FEDERAL HR EMPLOYMENT

The Federal Human Resources (HR) community is made up of a cadre of human resource experts who have been separated into seven distinct occupational series, working in Federal agencies spread around the world.¹ The Personnel Management (GS 201) occupation series represents the HR generalist who typically has a breadth of knowledge about personnel issues. Specialists possessing in-depth knowledge in a specific HR area have been in one of six series: Staffing (GS 212), Position Classification (GS 221), Employee Relations (GS 230), Labor Relations (GS 233), Employee Development (GS 235) and Equal Employment Opportunity (GS 260).

¹OPM is contemplating a revision to the job family these series comprise, which could result in the use of a single occupational series, GS 201, Human Resources Specialist, with appropriate specialty titles.

The Federal HR Workforce 1969-1998

HR Series	*1969*	*1991*	*1996*	*1998*
Personnel Mgmt GS 201	8,024	11,287	10,954	10,986
Staffing GS 212	3,485	3,547	2,210	2,009
Classification GS 221	2,470	2,079	1,151	868
Emp. Relations GS 230	1,236*	2,154	1,779	1,530
Labor Relations GS 233		1,113	1,080	1,022
Employee Dev. GS 235	1,800	2,737	2,203	1,890
EEO GS 260		2,451**	2,532	2,622
Total HR Workforce***	17,015	25,368	21,909	20,927
Total HR Workforce w/o EEO GS 260	17,015	22,917	19,377	18,305

*In 1976, GS 230 series split into GS 230 Employee Relations and GS 233 Labor Relations.

**In 1981, the GS 160 (Equal Employment) series split into GS 260 in the Federal sector and GS 360 for Non-Federal Equal Opportunity Compliance. The number of current GS 260 jobs that were in GS 160 in 1969 is unknown. About half of the GS 260 employees were Federally employed in various occupations in 1975.

***GS 203 Personnel Clerical & Assistance employees are not included in total.

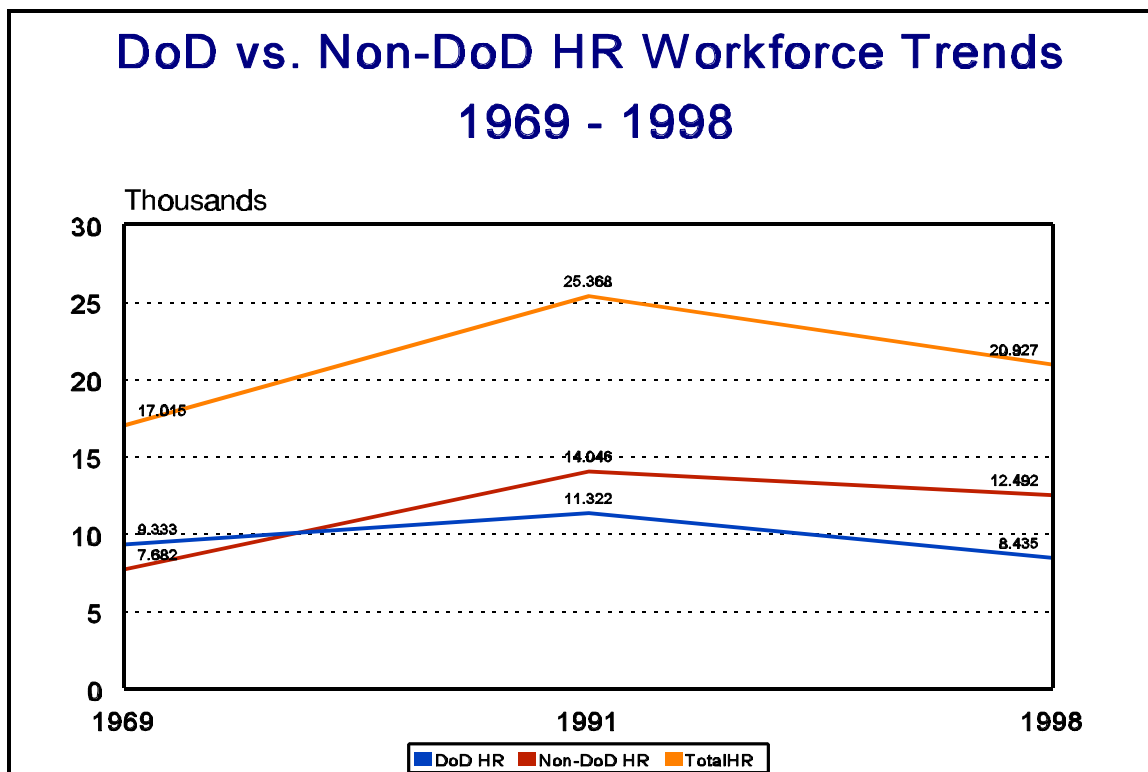
The number of human resource professionals working in the Federal Government soared to an all-time high in 1991. Full-time employment in personnel occupations increased by 49 percent from 1969 to 1991. Over this time, growth of Federal civilian personnel management occupations far outpaced that of the Federal (non-postal) workforce as whole, which remained nearly constant.

Legislative initiatives such as the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 and other policy shifts had a major impact on the growth of the Federal HR workforce, for example in the areas of performance management, employee and labor relations, and equal employment opportunity. Comparably, staff increases were also being witnessed in other administrative occupations such as budget (89 percent) and procurement (70 percent) during this time, while the rest of the Executive Branch remained nearly constant.

The HR field grew rapidly in the '70's and '80's, but took a nose dive during the '90's.

From 1991 to 1998, the HR field experienced a 17.5 percent drop, from 25,368 in 1991 to 20,927 in 1998. Excluding the Equal Employment Opportunity (GS 260) series, the HR workforce dropped by one-fifth (20 percent), from 22,917 to 18,305.

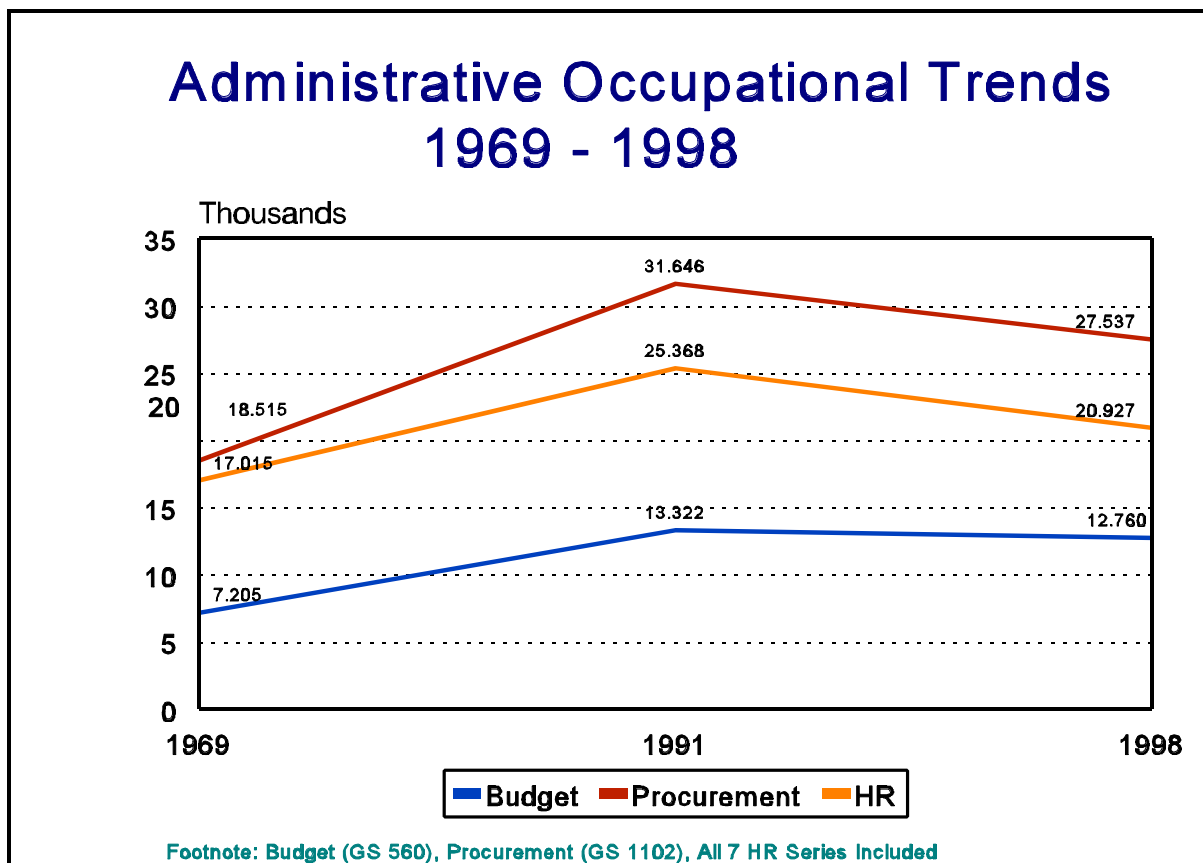
The decrease in the HR workforce in the Department of Defense (DoD) has been much greater than in the civilian agencies. The DoD HR workforce declined by 25.5 percent, from 11,322 in 1991 to 8,435 in 1998. The rest of the Federal Government HR's staff decreased by 11 percent, from 14,046 in 1991 to 12,492 in 1998. In 1969, DoD HR made up 55 percent of the total Federal HR workforce, while the civilian agency HR workforce made up 45 percent. With the growth of the overall Federal HR workforce, these percentages reversed. By 1991, the DoD HR workforce comprised 45 percent, and the civilian non-DoD HR workforce grew to 55 percent of the overall Federal HR workforce. Current levels show that DoD comprises 40 percent and the civilian agencies make up 60 percent of the total HR workforce.



Excluding the EEO series (GS 260), DoD's HR workforce dropped by 27 percent from 10,222 in 1991 to 7,457 in 1998. In comparison, the HR workforce in non-DoD agencies (excluding GS 260) decreased by 14.5 percent, from 12,695 in 1991 to 10,848 in 1998.

COMPARISONS WITH BUDGET AND PROCUREMENT OCCUPATIONS

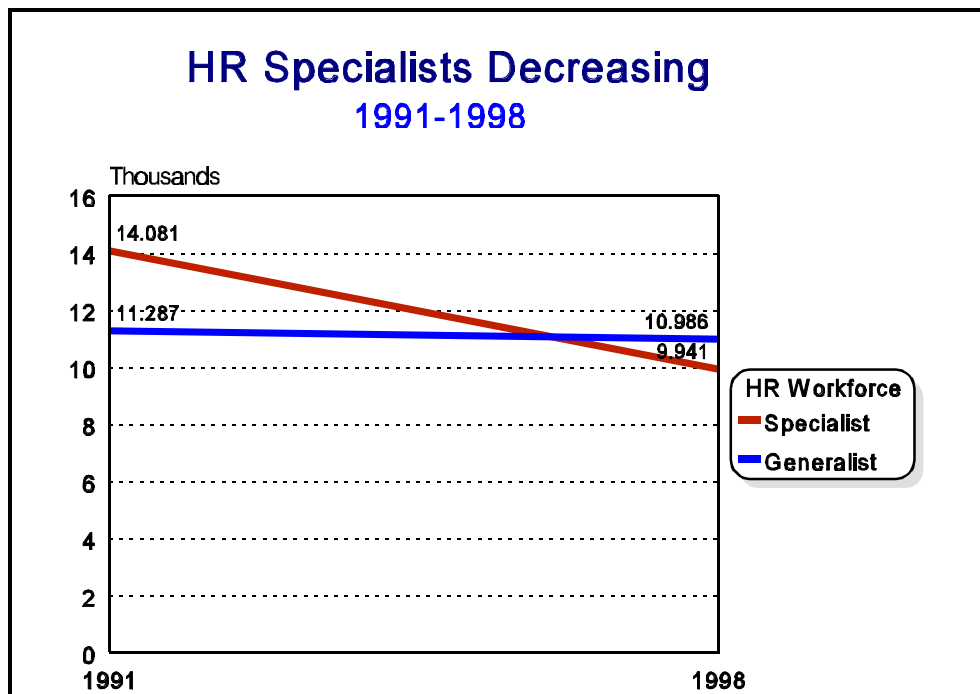
The decrease from 1991 to 1998 can be generally attributed to downsizing initiatives spawned by the National Performance Review that targeted personnel, procurement and budget occupations. Although not as pronounced as HR reductions, budget (GS 560) experienced a slight reduction of 4 percent and procurement (GS 1102) fell by 13 percent from 1991 to 1998.



HR SPECIALISTS VS. GENERALISTS

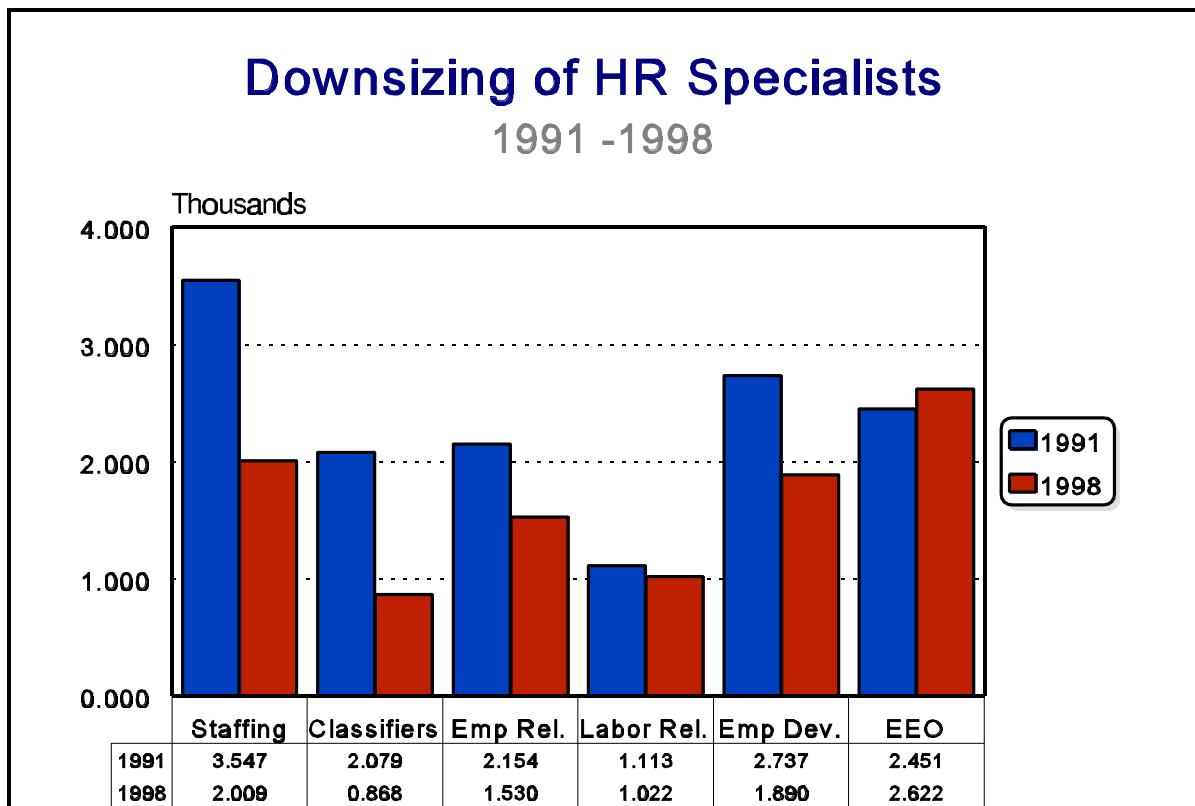
There has also been a small but noticeable shift occurring in the HR profession away from HR specialist and toward HR generalist positions. As the chart below shows, while the overall number of HR staff is decreasing, most of this decrease has taken place at the expense of HR specialists. The GS 201 (generalist) series has declined only slightly (2.7 percent) between 1991 and 1998, while the combined population of the specialty series plummeted by almost 30 percent.

These trends have significantly altered the relative proportion of generalists to specialists. In 1969, 47 percent of HR professionals were generalists and 53 percent were specialists. By 1991, generalists had decreased to 44 percent, while specialists grew to a high of 56 percent of all HR professionals. However, in 1998, generalists made up the majority (53 percent) of all HR professionals.



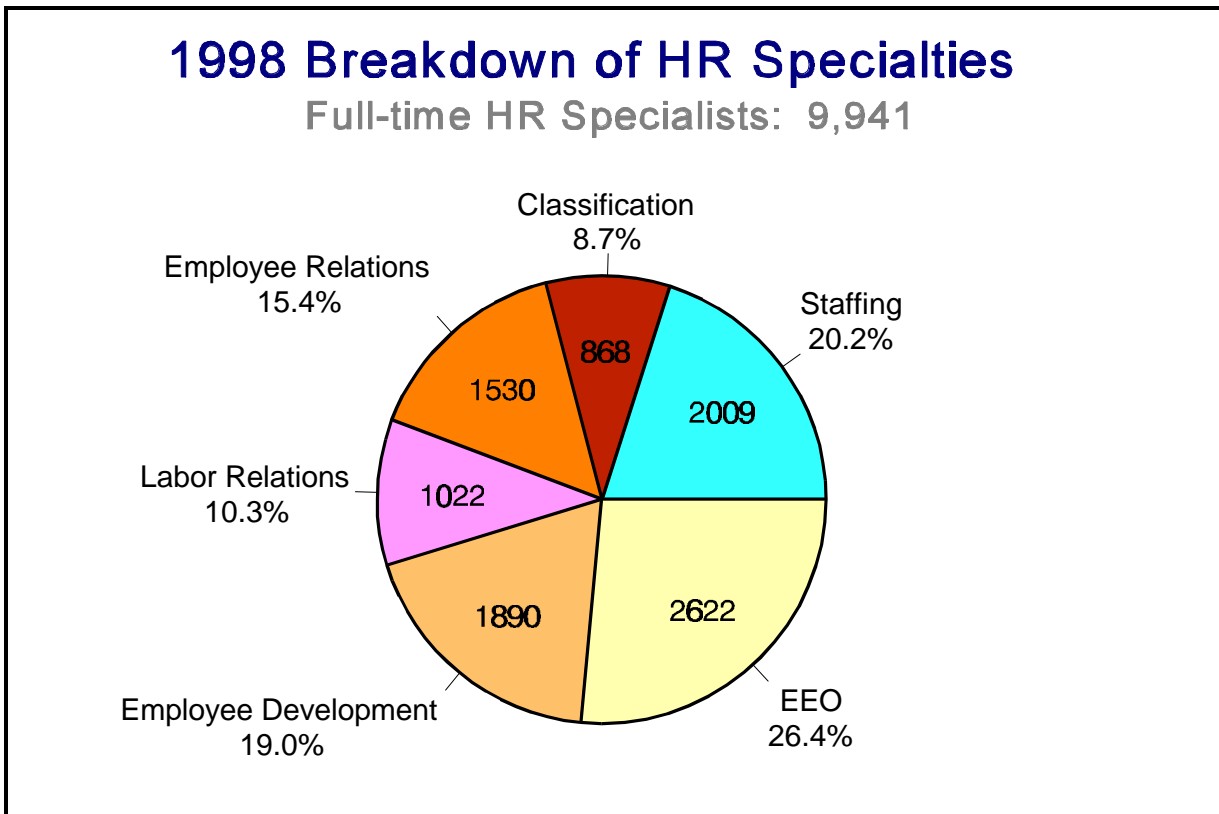
HR SPECIALTY SERIES

After peaking in 1991, every HR specialty has decreased except EEO. Staffing, (GS 212), Employee Relations (GS 230) and Employee Development (GS 235) have experienced tremendous downturns since 1991. As the following chart indicates, from 1991 to 1998 Staffing (GS 212) decreased by 43 percent and Employee Relations (GS 230) dropped by almost a third (29 percent). Employee Development (GS 235) also peaked in 1991, falling by 31 percent by 1998. Of all the HR specialties, Equal Employment Opportunity (GS 260) was the only one to see gains, albeit small (7 percent), during this period. This is explained to some extent by the fact that EEO specialists were not considered as part of the HR occupation by the National Performance Review (and in the DoD regionalization), and were under much less pressure to reduce their numbers (see page 16).



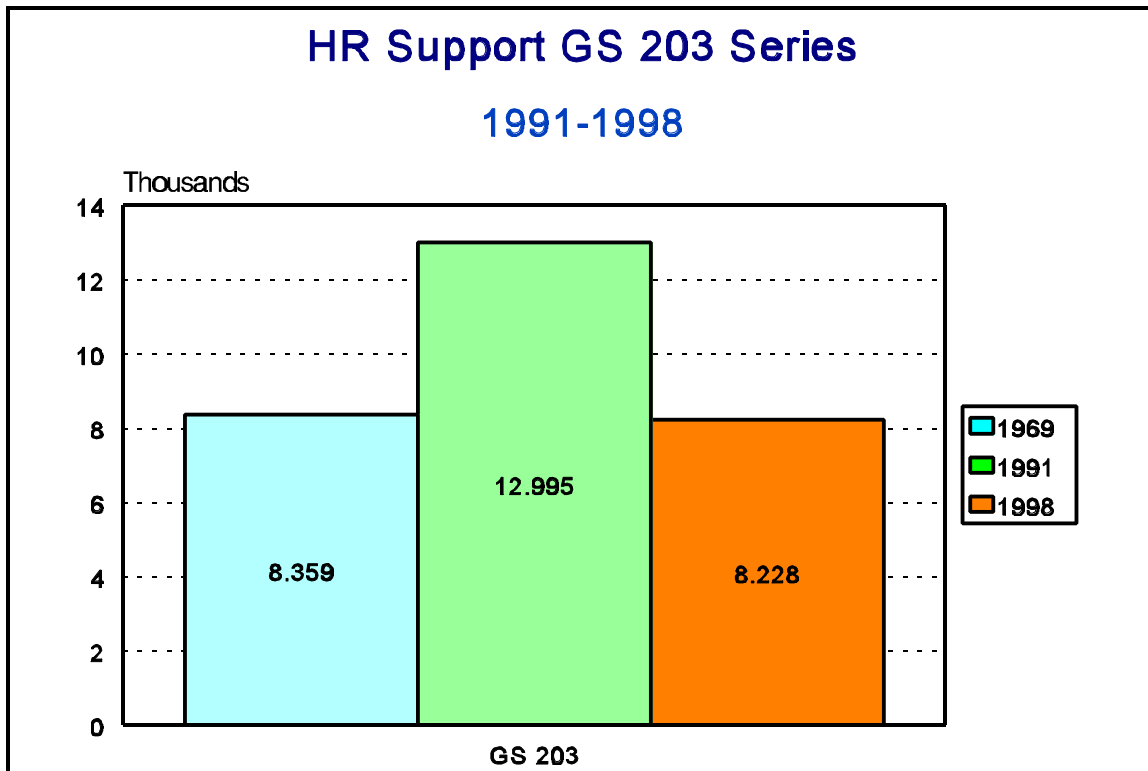
Among the HR specialties, none has undergone a more significant decrease than classification. Classifiers now comprise only 4 percent of all HR professionals, compared to 15 percent in 1969. This represents a decrease of 65 percent.

EEO is now the largest HR specialty, replacing staffing. The following chart shows the breakdown of each HR specialty as of September 1998 (excluding the GS 201 series). EEO now accounts for about one-fourth of all HR specialists. Staffing, formerly the largest HR specialty, is the second largest with 20 percent. The smallest series is Classification at 8.7 percent of all HR specialists.



HR SUPPORT PERSONNEL

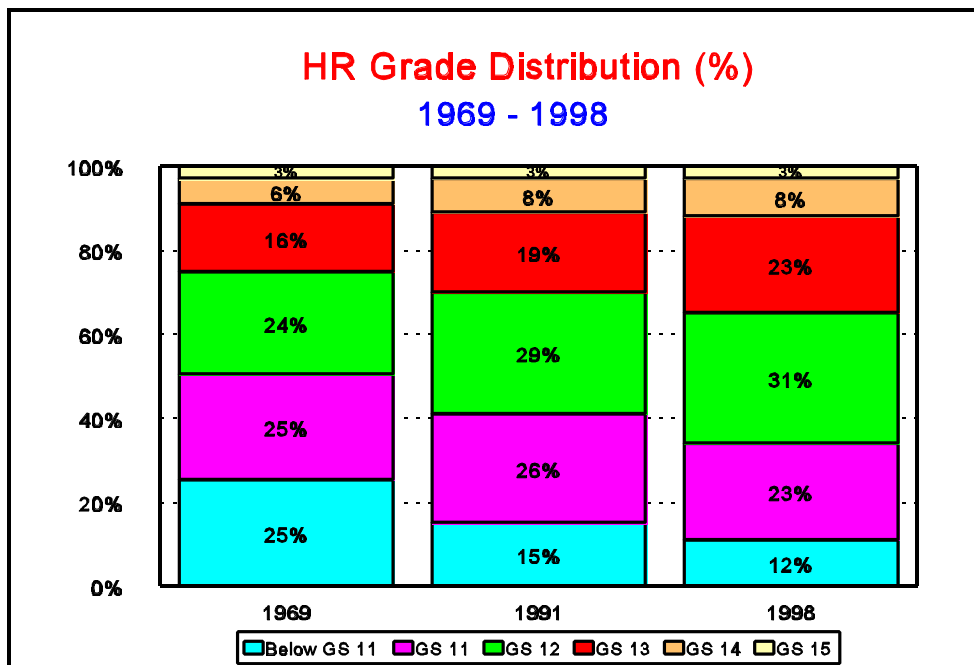
The number of HR support employees has declined drastically since 1991, but not as much as support employees overall. The GS 203 Personnel Clerical & Assistance series increased by 55 percent in the 22 years from 1969 to 1991. But, from 1991 to 1998, GS 203 plummeted by 37 percent in just 7 years, falling from 12,995 in 1991 to 8,228 in 1998. By comparison, the total population of the support occupations in the Executive Branch decreased by 44 percent, from 373,768 employees in 1990 to 209,278 employees in 1997.



HR GRADE DISTRIBUTION

The average grade of the HR workforce increased slightly over the 1969 to 1998 period from 11.16 to 11.85. By comparison, the average grade for GS employees in the Executive Branch rose from 7.72 in 1969 to 9.51 in 1998.

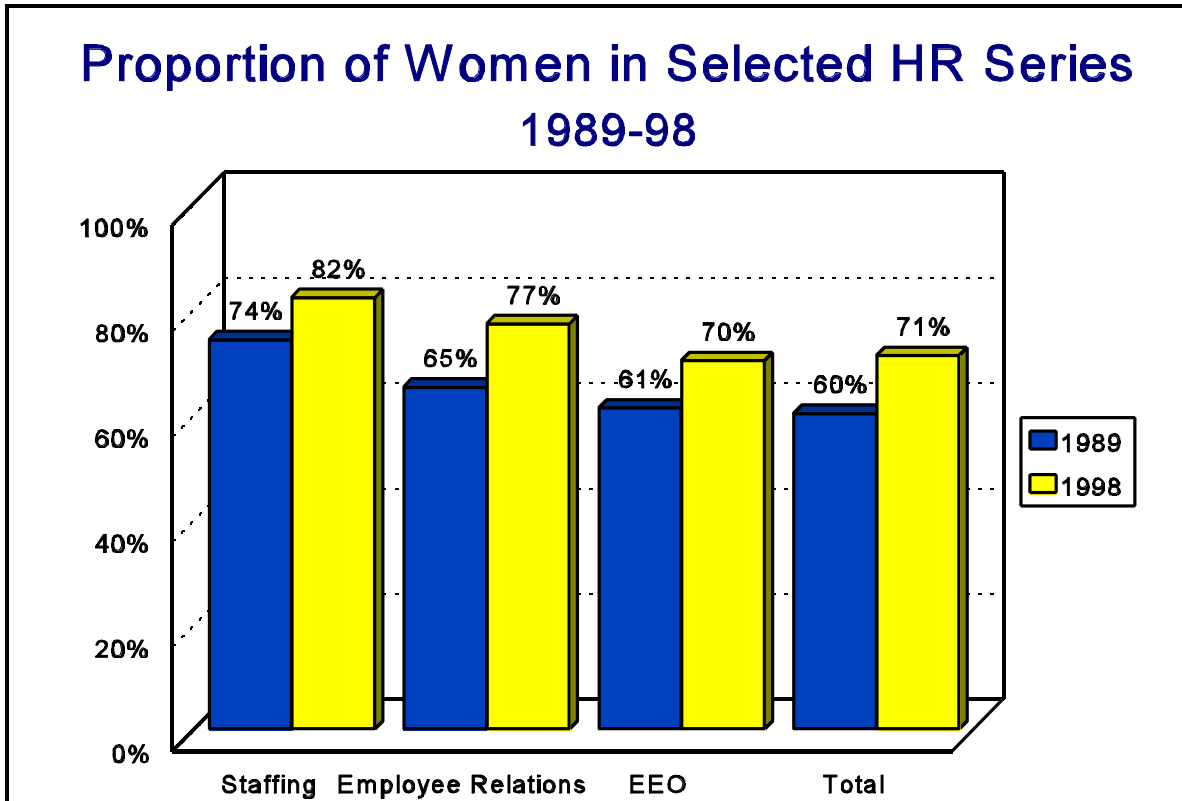
Over half (52 percent) of the HR workforce were at the GS 12 and GS 13 grade levels in 1998, compared with 40 percent in 1969. Both GS 12 and GS 13 each grew 7 percentage points from 1969 to 1998. GS 14 grade level employees increased from 6 percent in 1969 to 8 percent in 1991, remaining constant at 8 percent in 1998. GS-15 grade levels remained proportionately the same (3 percent) from 1969 to 1998. Meanwhile, GS 11 grade levels dropped by 2 percentage points, from 25 percent in 1969 to 23 percent in 1998. Twenty-five percent were in positions below GS 11 in 1969, falling to 12 percent in 1998.



HR EMPLOYMENT BY GENDER

Since 1969, the gender composition of HR occupations has changed dramatically. In 1969, women represented only 30 percent (5,181) of employees in these series. By 1989, female representation had substantially increased to 60 percent of the HR workforce. As of 1998, the proportion of women had risen further, to almost three-fourths (71 percent) of the Federal HR workforce.

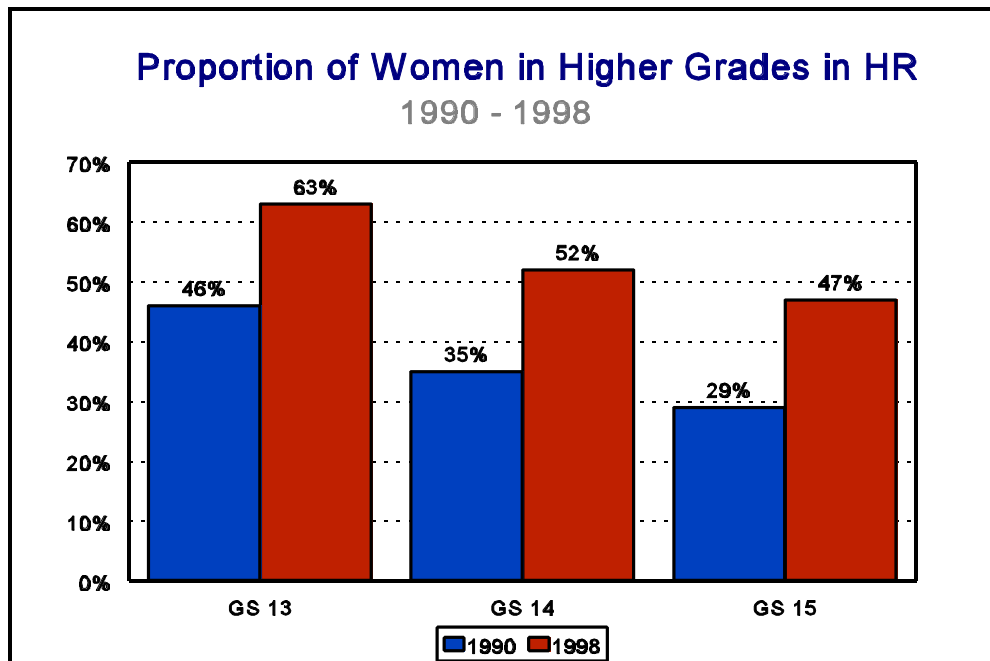
The increase in the proportion of women has taken place across series. As indicated in the following chart, the three series with the most women in 1989 all had even higher percentages in 1998. Employee Relations saw the greatest change with a 12 percentage point increase in the number of women.



GRADE DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER

Women have increasingly moved into higher grades in HR during the last 8 years.

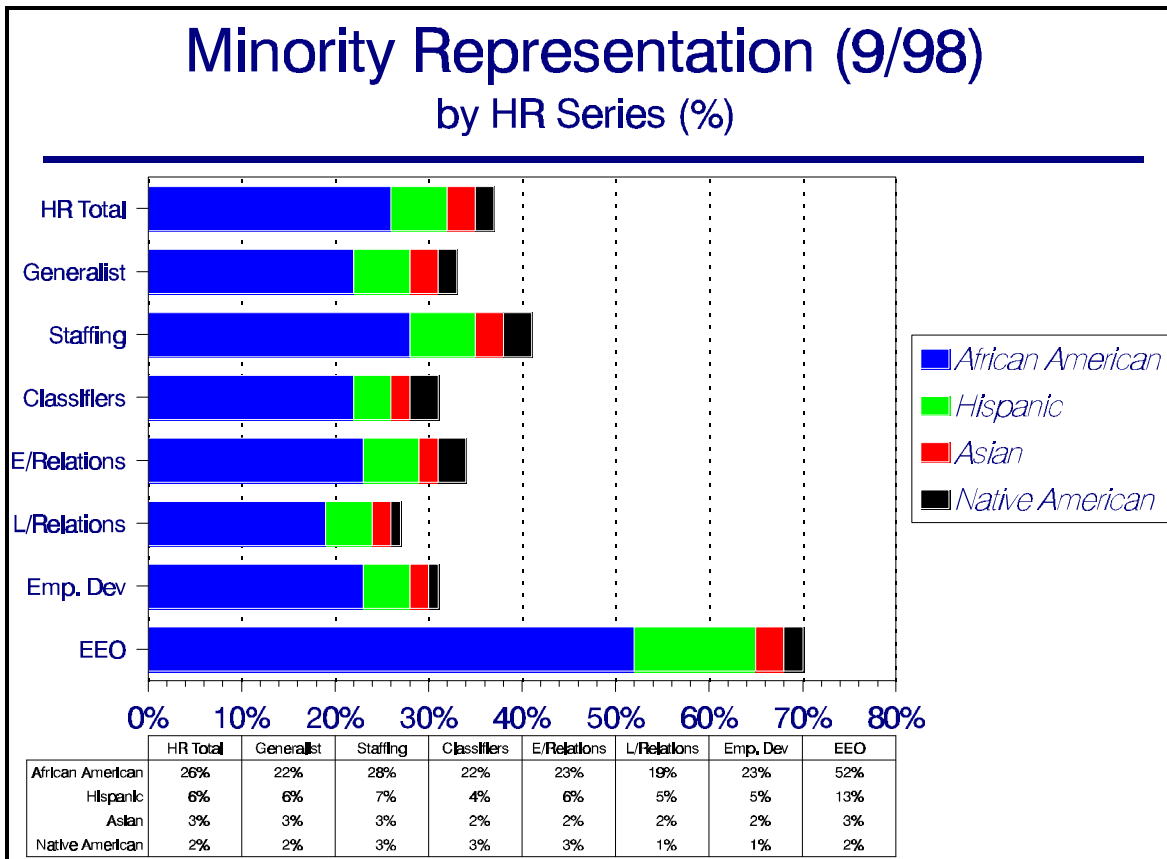
However, they are still under-represented compared to their proportion of the HR workforce overall (71 percent). In 1990, women held 46 percent and men held 54 percent of the GS 13 HR positions. By 1998, that figured had changed to women holding 63 percent and men holding 37 percent of GS 13 HR positions. Similarly, in 1990 women held 35 percent and men held 65 percent of the GS 14 positions in HR while by 1998, over half (52 percent) of GS 14 positions were held by women, and 48 percent by men. At GS 15, in 1990 women held 29 percent and men held almost three-fourths (71 percent) of the positions. But by 1998, women occupied almost half (47 percent) and men held 53 percent of GS 15 positions in the Federal HR field.



Women continue to be heavily represented at the lower and mid-level grades. In 1990, women represented nearly 80 percent of employment at GS grades 5 through 11 in the HR field. In 1998, significant female representation was still found at each grade level: GS 5 (89 percent), GS 7 (86 percent), GS 9 (85 percent), and GS 11 (77 percent).

The feminization of the HR field can be partly attributed to upward mobility programs. Technical and clerical employees are typically selected for administrative occupations with advancement potential. In personnel, the entry source historically for many employees was the GS 203 series, Personnel Clerical and Assistance. Forty-one percent of full-time permanent employees in GS 203 in 1979, who remained Federally employed, had moved to non-clerical HR series in 1989. Ninety percent of those making “upward moves” were women.

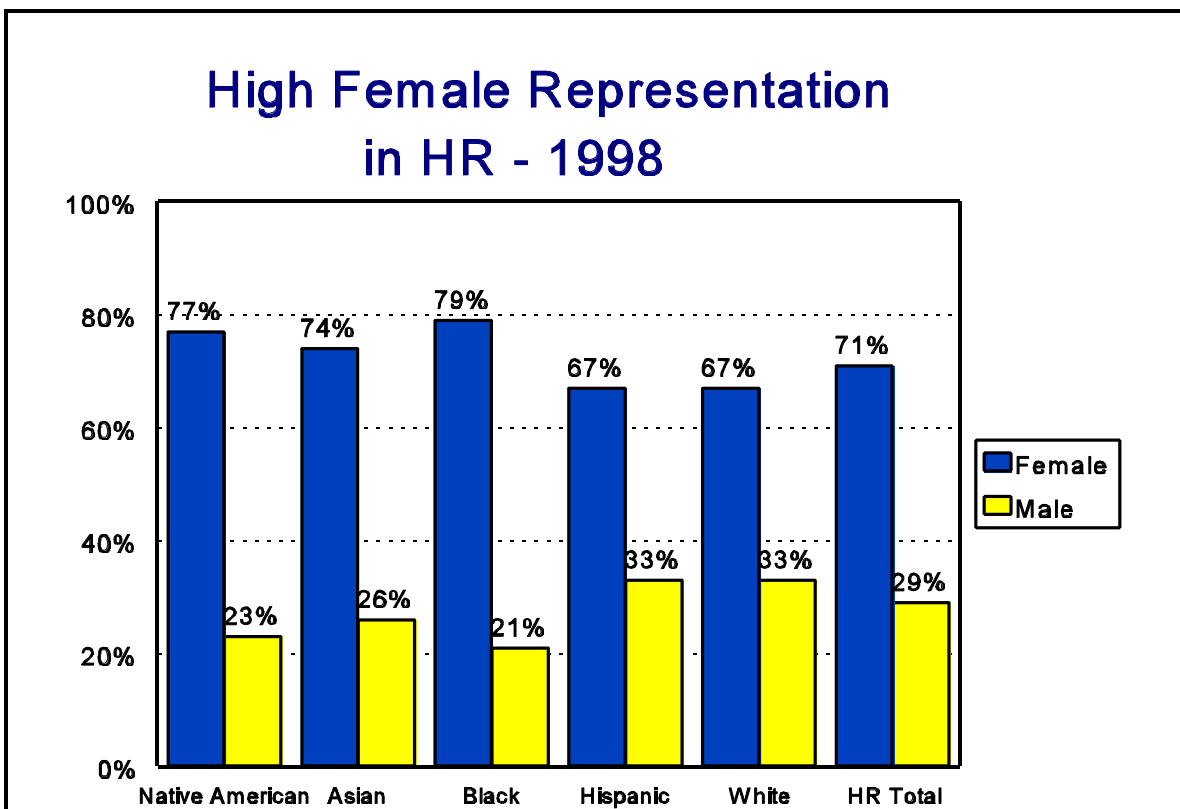
MINORITY REPRESENTATION



Minority representation in HR occupations more than doubled over the past 22 years. In 1976, only 15 percent of employees in the Federal HR field were minorities. In 1990, that figure had doubled to 31 percent, and by 1998 37 percent of the HR workforce were minorities. The highest minority representation, at 70 percent, is in the GS 260 (Equal Employment Opportunity) series. The lowest minority representation among all HR series can be found in Labor Relations, at 27 percent.

The HR workforce has generally the same or greater diversity than the Federal workforce as a whole, except for Asian Americans. Current data shows that minorities make up 29 percent of the Federal workforce, compared to 37 percent of the HR workforce. While African Americans are 17 percent of the Federal Government as a whole, they are 26 percent of the HR workforce. Hispanics had the same representation (6 percent) in HR as in the Federal Government as a whole. Native Americans also fared about the same in HR (2 percent) as in the Federal Government (2 percent). Only Asians were better represented in the Federal Government (4 percent) as a whole than in HR (3 percent).

GENDER AND DIVERSITY IN HR

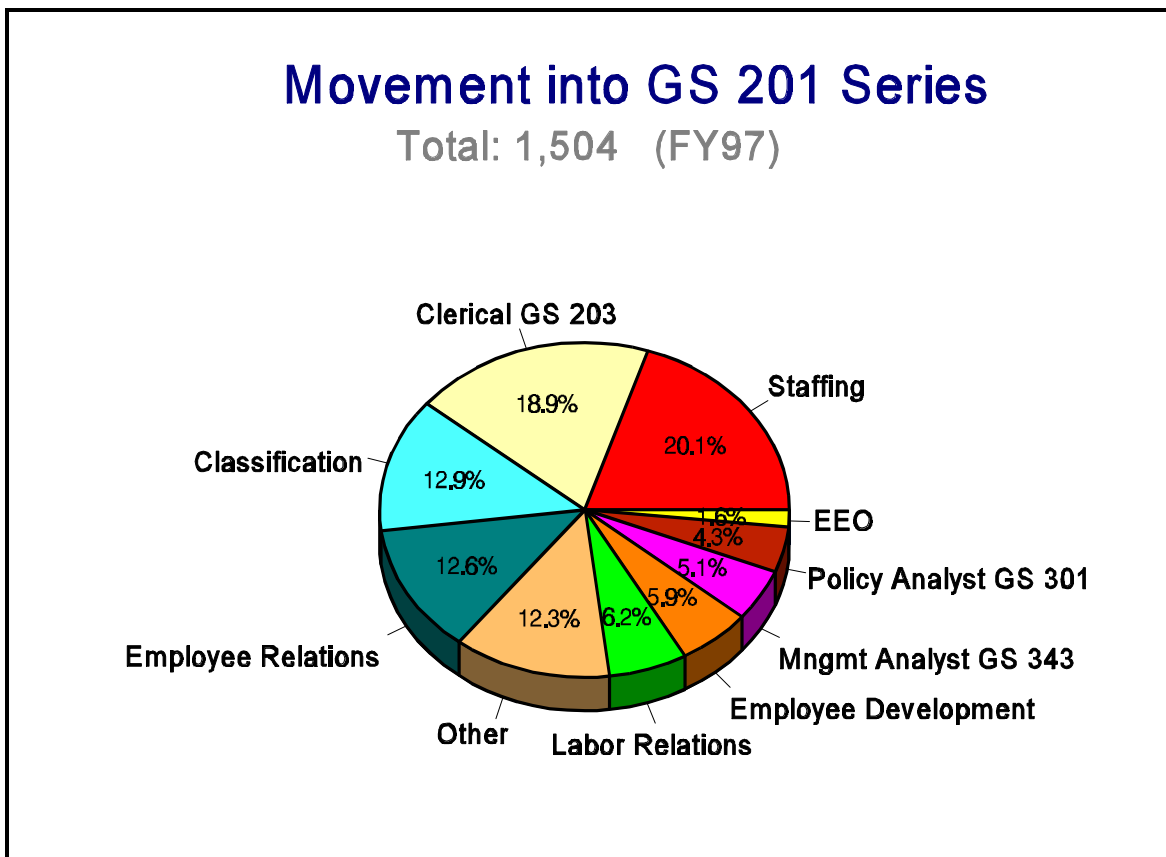


Among minorities, the proportion of women is greatest among African Americans. As the following chart shows, of the African Americans working in HR, women outnumber men almost 4 to 1. In addition, there are triple the number of Asian and Native American women to men working in HR. The proportion of women to men in these groups is consistent with the ratio of 3 to 1 for all minorities combined. The numbers of Hispanic and White women are about double those of Hispanic and White men.

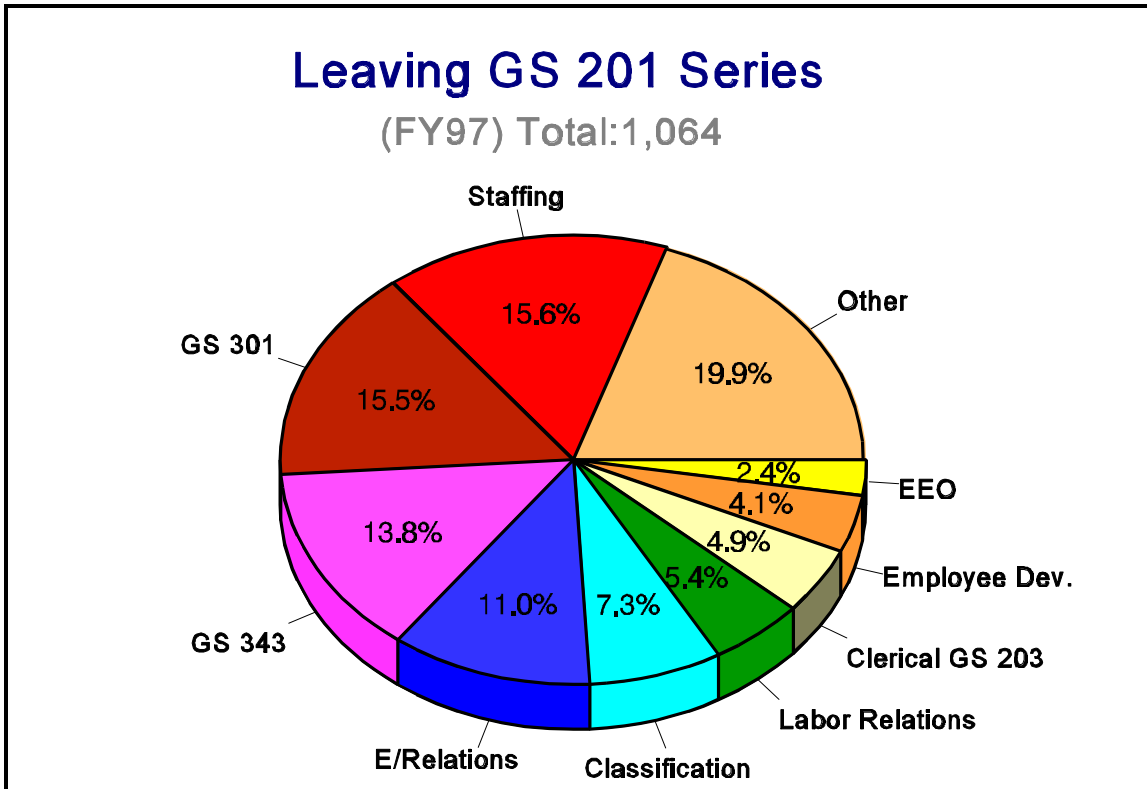
MOVEMENT IN AND OUT OF HR

In a recent year, FY97, considerably more people moved into the GS 201 (generalist) series from other series than left for other series. A total of 1,504 came from other Federal occupations compared to just 99 new hires. Meanwhile, a much smaller number, 1,064, moved from GS 201 to other occupations. Four hundred seventy-one retired, 114 quit, 13 were laid off, and 22 left through other means.

The movement into GS 201 mostly came from HR specialty and clerical series. Twenty percent came from GS 212 Staffing (302 employees), 19 percent from GS 203 Personnel Clerical and Assistance series (285 employees), 13 percent from GS 221 Classification (194 employees), and 13 percent from GS 230 Employee Relations (190 employees). Less than 10 percent (142 employees) came from the non-HR generalist series (GS 301 and GS 343), and less than a quarter (21.7 percent) came from non-HR series overall.

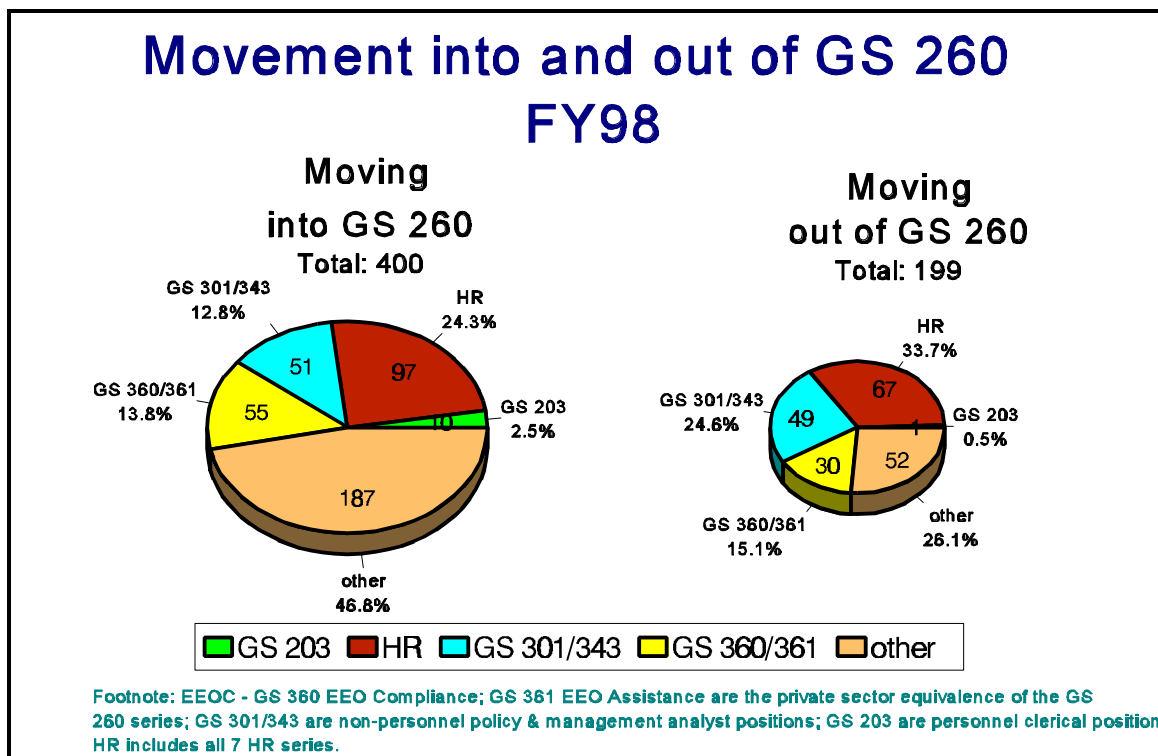


But movement out of GS 201 was often to non-HR series GS 301 and GS 343 (29.3 percent of total). In raw numbers, 312 left GS 201 for these series compared to the 142 who went the opposite way. In all, almost half (49.2 percent) of those leaving GS 201 moved to non-HR series where they may still have HR duties in more general administrative roles.



EEO MOVEMENT

In FY 98 there was a net influx of employees into the EEO specialty series. As noted earlier, currently the EEO series (GS 260) ranks as the largest HR specialty series. GS 260 was the only HR series not targeted for reductions by the National Performance Review. As the chart below shows, more people (400) moved into GS 260 from other job series than moved out (199) in FY98. A higher percentage moved out of GS 260 to HR series (33.7 percent) than moved into GS 260 from other HR series (24.3 percent). About the same percentage moved into GS 260 from GS 360/361 (13.8%) as moved out (15.1%) to GS 360/361, a series that focuses on EEO in the private sector, about twice the percentage left GS 260 for GS 301/343 (24.6 percent) as left GS 301/343 for GS 260 (12.8 percent). Interestingly, the single greatest (46.8 percent) source of employees coming into the GS 260 series was the group of over 70 “other” non-HR series, including budget, research and many other occupations. By contrast, only a quarter (26.1 percent) moving out of GS 260 went to these “other” non-HR series.



NEW HIRES

Among the relatively small numbers hired in HR in 1997, half were generalists. This is slightly greater than the 47 percent hired the previous year but below the total proportion of generalists in HR currently (53 percent). Almost half (46 percent) of all the HR new hires in 1997 were hired at the GS 12-13 grade level. Closer analysis reveals that the majority of these new hires, particularly in the GS 201 series, were brought in as reinstatements, and to a lesser extent, under excepted appointments. In FY97, over half (54 percent) of the 48 new hires at the GS 12-13 grade level in the GS 201 series were reinstatements and 44 percent were excepted appointments. At GS 11, 9 of the 12 new hires in GS 201 came in as reinstatements and the other 3 under excepted appointments. Finally, at the GS 9 grade level, half of the ten hired into the GS 201 series came in as reinstatements and the other half as excepted appointments.

Meanwhile, the majority of new hires at the GS 5-7 grade levels were brought in under career conditional appointments. In the GS 201 series, 14 of the 18 hired at the GS 7 level and 2 of the 3 hired at the GS 5 level had career conditional appointments. Similar proportions were also found for those hired in HR speciality series at the GS 5-7 level.

1997 New Hires in HR							
<i>(%) New Hires</i>	<i>General GS 201</i>	<i>Staffing GS 212</i>	<i>Classification GS 221</i>	<i>Employee Relations GS 230</i>	<i>Labor Relations GS 233</i>	<i>Employee Development GS 235</i>	<i>EEO GS 260</i>
<i>GS 5-7 Total: 30 (15%)</i>	21	5	2	0	1	1	0
<i>GS 9-11 Total: 62 (31%)</i>	22	11	6	2	5	4	12
<i>GS 12-13 Total: 90 (46%)</i>	48	8	4	9	10	3	8
<i>GS 14 Total: 11 (6%)</i>	7	1	1	1	1	0	0
<i>GS 15 Total: 4 (2%)</i>	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
<i>Total: 197 (100%)</i>	99 (50%)	26 (13%)	13 (7%)	12 (6%)	17 (9%)	8 (4%)	22 (11%)

[CPDF defines New Hires as Excepted Appointments, Competitive appointments (Career, Career Conditional and Temporary/Limited) and Reinstatements].

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Over three-fourths (79 percent) of all HR professionals report having continued their education beyond high school. Also, in FY98, half (50 percent) of all HR professionals had earned a Bachelors Degree or beyond. In all, over one-third (35 percent) held Bachelor Degrees and 14 percent held a Masters Degree. It is important to note that these statistics understate the level of educational attainment, since education attained after an employee is hired is sometimes not captured in CPDF.

This problem, however, does not affect data on new hires, which is reported upon entering the Federal service. The chart below indicates the percentages of new entrants in each HR series who have earned at least a Bachelors Degree. Of the generalists (GS 201) hired in FY98, 52 percent held at least a Bachelors Degree. People newly hired in Employee Development (GS 235) were on average more educated (88 percent) than those hired in other HR series in FY98. Overall, slightly over half (52 percent) of HR new hires in FY98 held at least a Bachelors Degree, compared with 55 percent of all HR new hires in FY94.

New Hires with at least BA Degree

FY 94, FY98

	New Hires (FY94)	New Hires (FY98)
GS 201	56%	52%
GS 212	31%	55%
GS 221	53%	36%
GS 230	50%	42%
GS 233	47%	61%
GS 235	60%	88%
GS 260	67%	45%
Total HR	55%	52%
Total #	332	436

New Hires include excepted appts, reinstatements, temporary/limited, career & career conditional.

The proportion of HR employees with Bachelors Degrees may have decreased since 1990.

Based on CPDF, the percentage of college graduates decreased from 55 percent in 1990 to 50 percent in 1998. This holds true in nearly all HR series, with the exception of Employee Development, which had a 4 percentage point increase in reported college graduates from 1990 to 1998. However, until ways can be found to capture accurately education attained during employment, no firm conclusions can be drawn regarding education.

HR professionals bring a wealth of knowledge from diverse academic backgrounds. The top academic disciplines in 1998 recorded by HR staff for their personnel records were such fields as Business, Public Administration, Human Resource Management, English, Social Sciences, Education, Law, and Journalism. Business was the number one academic discipline of HR professionals with a total of 2,431, out-pacing even the field of Human Resource Management itself. Not making the top, but also important, were such disciplines as Accounting (132), Economics (131), and Marketing (96).

THE GRAYING OF HR

The HR workforce is on average older and has considerably more Federal experience than the rest of the Federal workforce. As of September 1998, the average age of the Federal HR employee was 47 years old with 21 years of experience. In contrast, the average Federal employee is slightly younger at 44 years old and has 15 years of Federal service. In addition, over half (52 percent) of the HR workforce had over 20 years of Federal experience. The generalist (GS 201) series had the highest proportion (55 percent) of employees with over 20 years, while the Staffing series (GS 212) had the least (44 percent).

Ten percent of the HR workforce was eligible to retire in 1998. Among specific HR series, FY98 data shows retirement eligibles ranging from 15 percent among the EEO specialists to 7 percent among Staffing specialists.

One-third (33 percent) of the HR workforce will be eligible to retire in the next 5 years. As the chart below shows, while only 10 percent of the HR workforce are currently eligible to retire, the next 5 years could see an exodus through retirement. In the Senior Executive Service, over half (61 percent) are eligible to retire over the next 5 years.

Retirement Eligibility			
HR Workforce: 19,040 (9/98)			
Age Group	Currently Eligible	Eligible in Next 5 Years	Total
50-54	0	3,573	3,573
55-59	1,141	827	1,968
60-61	296	43	339
62+	420	0	420
Total	1,857	4,443	6,300
Percentage	9.8	23.3	33.1

CONCLUSION

During the 1990's there has been substantial change in the size and make-up of the Federal HR profession. Reversing the trend of previous decades, the number of HR professionals has declined by 17.5 percent since 1991. Generalists are now in the majority in the occupation, with the six specialist series making up just 47 percent of all HR professionals. Among these specialist series, only EEO specialists have increased in numbers during the decade and now rank as the most populous HR specialist series, replacing staffing specialists. Interagency transfers indicate that HR specialists are increasingly moving into the HR generalist series, and that almost a third of all HR generalists who leave the GS 201 series leave for non-HR generalist series.

The educational levels and demographic attributes of the HR workforce have also changed, though less dramatically in the current decade. The proportion of Federal employees holding degrees appears to have declined in the '90's, although incomplete data precludes drawing any firm conclusions. Slightly over half of the new HR entrants in FY98 had earned at least a Bachelors Degree. Meanwhile, the proportion of women and ethnic minorities continues to rise. Women now constitute 71 percent of the professional HR workforce, and ethnic minorities are as a group better represented in HR than in the Federal workforce as a whole. Women also continue to make strides up the career ladder. The HR population is older than the Federal workforce in general, with fully one-third of all HR professionals eligible to retire within the next 5 years.

These are the essential statistical facts about the current HR professional workforce. As this special study continues, future reports will interpret this statistical information and will assess the current and future capability of the HR workforce to meet the increased demands being placed on it.