



Human Resources Bulletin Number: 07-03

Subject: Clarification to Qualification Requirements for GS-401, Fire Management Specialist Positions

References: Human Resources Advisory Number 002 (dated 9/3/03); Supplemental Qualification Standard for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior, GS-401 Fire Management Specialist; OPM Individual Occupational Requirements (IOR) for GS-401 series; Qualification Standards for GS Positions under the Group Coverage Qualifications Standard for Professional and Scientific Positions

Attachments 2 and 3 to HR Advisory 002 are hereby rescinded.

Distribution: Associate Director Visitor and Resource Protection, Regional and Center Human Resources Managers

Point of Contact: Servicing Personnel Office or Field Advisory Services and Executive Resources Division (FASER), Office of Human Resources

Effective Date: May 8, 2007

Sunset Date: Until rescinded or superseded

This Human Resources Bulletin provides information and clarification concerning the appropriate qualification standard and its interpretation and use when reviewing qualifications for all Fire Management Specialist, GS-401 positions in the National Park Service. This Bulletin amends and supersedes the previous guidance stated in HR Advisory Number 002, dated September 3, 2003, and associated attachments which presented the GS-401 Supplemental Qualification Standard and implementing guidance.

As a result of recent meetings with U.S Office of Personnel Management, the Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Forest Service, it became clear that immediate changes and adjustments were needed to our approach to performing qualifications reviews for these positions.

First, it must be clarified that all GS-401 Fire Management Specialist positions in the National Park Service are covered under the OPM Individual Occupational Requirements (IOR) for GS-401 series (<http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/SEC-IV/B/GS0400/0401.HTML>), contained in the Qualifications Standard for GS Positions. All applicants for GS-401 Fire Management Specialist positions must satisfy the minimum education requirements stated there.

Under these requirements, the applicant may qualify based on possession of either a 4-year degree in one of the related fields of study listed, or as an alternative, may possess an equivalent combination of 4 years of education and experience that included at least 24 semester hours in a directly related field of study that was comparable to a major. Although the standard does not specify the number of semester/quarter hours that must be upper level courses (junior and senior level classes) under this provision, it is clear that the coursework that constitutes a major in a field of study must progress substantially beyond the second year of college. Therefore, you must determine that this study was progressing towards a bachelor's degree, and that the directly-related coursework included courses at the junior/senior level that would count toward satisfying the requirements of a major in the field at the bachelor's degree level. This substantial educational core can then be supplemented by appropriate related experience to total four years.

To further clarify, since the coursework that constitutes a major in any field of study must progress substantially beyond the second year of college, it is evident that the education completed solely within an associate degree program could not be considered equivalent to a major course of study at the baccalaureate level.

This issue was addressed most recently by OPM in a March 16, 2007, letter to the Department of Interior, regarding the educational requirements associated with GS-401 Fire Management Specialist positions, and that I forwarded to NPS HR Council on April 10, 2007. Additional explanation and guidance about accepting college coursework to satisfy the basic education requirements can be found on the OPM website in the Qualifications Standards for GS Positions Group Coverage Qualifications Standard for Professional and Scientific Positions (<http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/sec-iv/A/GS-PROF.asp>).

In accordance with long-standing OPM regulatory guidance, only education completed at an accredited college or university is acceptable to count towards satisfying minimum education requirements. (Accredited means that at the time the education was obtained, the entire institution, the applicable school within the institution, or the applicable curriculum was appropriately accredited by an accrediting organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.) Appropriate courses can be accepted for credit towards meeting education requirements only if supported by official college documentation, such as listing on an official transcript (or copy) from an accredited educational institution.

Therefore, effective immediately, National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses can no longer be accepted as creditable toward meeting the basic educational requirement for GS-401 Fire Management positions, unless they have been submitted to an accredited U.S. college or university for course evaluation and credit, and they are listed on an official transcript from the school.

In implementing the above requirements, effective immediately, Attachments 2 and 3 to HR Advisory 002 ("Application of Education and Specialized Experience" and "Other Education Creditable towards 24 Semester Hours Requirement") are rescinded, and are no longer to be used in determining applicant qualifications for these positions. (These attachments contain information about coursework creditable towards the requirements.)

Additionally, the GS-401 Supplemental Standard and Attachment 1 to HR Advisory 002, which contain additional information about the specialized experience and education that is required to qualify for these fire management positions, are currently being reviewed by DOI. Further guidance on this will be issued as appropriate in the near future.

It is important to note that the information on the GS-401 qualification standards and their use stated above applies to all GS-401 Fire Management Specialist positions in the National Park Service, whether or not they are part of the 14 key positions under the Interagency Fire Management Program (IFPM).

We recognize that there may be situations identified where a current employee was found qualified for his/her current GS-401 fire management position based on crediting National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses toward meeting the basic educational requirement. Since these jobs are found throughout the Department of Interior and the U.S. Forest Service, we are currently working with the Department to determine the best approach to take to resolve this with the least possible adverse impact.

We expect that each of these cases will need to be reviewed on a case by case basis to find the best and least disruptive resolution. Melissa Anglin has been appointed as the NPS focal point to request employee information needed and make the necessary reviews. Affected employees and individual Human Resources Offices will be notified of any such requested position review. I wish to emphasize that every effort will be made to avoid negative impacts on affected employees.

Any questions concerning this policy should be directed to Melissa Anglin, APC-HR Franchise, on (252) 473-3468.

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