



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

Strategic Human
Resources Policy
Division

MAR 16 2007

Ms. Rosemary Downing
Director, Talent and Retention Division
Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW, Mail Stop 5211
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Downing:

I am forwarding this letter as a follow-up to our meeting on March 13, 2007 regarding education requirements associated with the GS-401 Fire Management Specialist Series. At your request, we met to discuss the standard's current requirement of 24 semester hours in biological sciences, natural resources, wildland fire management, forestry, or agriculture equivalent to a major field of study, and the agreement between the Department of Interior (DOI) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) requiring incumbents and new hires into Fire Manager positions to complete at least 18 of the required 24 semester hours in upper level course work. Your question to us was whether or not OPM could sanction this practice.

We have reviewed the materials submitted by both you and Ms. Gloria Banks, of the USDA. We also looked at the Group Coverage Qualification Standard for Professional and Scientific Positions. In describing course work considered as equivalent to a major field of study, the standard prescribes that the nature and quality of this course work must have been such that it would serve as a prerequisite for more advanced study in the field or subject matter area. However, our standards make no provision for splitting up levels of course work to meet education requirements at specific ratios. The minimum standard requires that all 24 hours meet the levels described for Professional and Scientific positions. Consequently, OPM is not able to sanction the practice of specifying the number of hours for upper or lower level courses.

If your agency desires to pursue this further, we recommend coordinating a formal request with the U.S. Department of Agriculture supported by valid and reliable criteria for this additional requirement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Fusco".

Daniel Fusco
Group Manager
Recruiting, Examining and
Assessment

cc: Gloria J. Banks, USDA