

ISSUES OF MERIT

June 2005

a publication of
the U.S. Merit Systems
Protection Board,
Office of Policy
and Evaluation

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Keeping the Target on Training

Implementation of new personnel systems demands it.

It is no longer news that the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Defense (DoD) will implement new personnel and compensation systems. Supervisors and employees at these agencies are considering what the impact of pay for performance will be on how they do their work and how they work with each other. Training for both employees and supervisors will play a key role in helping them understand these changes and in making the new systems succeed.

Both departments have taken the first steps toward providing such training. The Department of Navy, for example, has released an initial description of the web-based training it will offer managers under the new personnel system. Critics worry that web-based delivery is not the best medium to develop the interpersonal skills critical to performance management. But this is still a good beginning. Furthermore, Navy's *National Security Personnel System's (NSPS) Training and Development Roadmap* calls for face-to-face management development activities as well as web-based training. DHS has also announced plans to offer "soft skills" classroom training to help supervisors and managers learn their new roles.

To be effective, training must not just be initially available—it must remain available. It is conventional wisdom in

both public and private sector human resources (HR) circles that training funds are among the first to disappear when budget belts tighten. DoD and DHS have planned for this hurdle by creating specific training funds. Visibility in the budget will help prevent slow leakage of training resources to other efforts. We applaud these departments for valuing training and encourage their efforts to safeguard training funds after time passes and the new systems fade from public awareness.

Experience shows that, in addition to budget pressure, several factors can reduce the overall effectiveness of training. As agencies develop their training for new personnel systems, they should also adopt safeguards against the following three threats to long-term training effectiveness.

Vendor-driven training content.

It is important that managerial and supervisory training target specific coaching and performance evaluation skills needed under the new personnel systems. Likewise, employees need training in maximizing their contributions to agency mission and in effectively representing these contributions in performance discussions. These goals will not benefit from weakly reformulated, off-the-shelf coursework in generic interpersonal skills or

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ISSUES OF MERIT

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The MSPB Office of Policy and Evaluation conducts studies to assess the health of Federal merit systems and to ensure they are free from prohibited personnel practices.

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We offer insights and analyses on topics related to Federal human capital management, particularly findings and recommendations from our independent research.

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DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

A Balancing Act

Can we achieve openness and efficiency in Federal hiring?

The first merit system principle under Section 2301 of Title 5, United States Code calls for fair and open competition in how we recruit and select people into the Federal civil service. The processes designed to carry out this principle have, unfortunately, created a cumbersome hiring system that attempts to achieve two often competing goals: efficiency and fairness. The attempt to balance administrative ease, logic, and speed with fairness and transparency about our Government's operation has resulted in a complex system that serves neither goal very well. In particular, we have created multiple paths into Federal employment that confuse applicants about how to find a job; this confusion impairs Government's ability to hire well-qualified career entry candidates at a time when they are badly needed.

How we hire people in the Federal Government is of particular importance today. We have reached a tipping point in terms of our workforce gaining retirement eligibility, with the number now being over 50 percent eligible to retire in the next five years. This rapid aging of the workforce is occurring at a time when the percentage of full-time, permanent employees under the age of 30 is in the single digits. It is clear that to address this human capital crisis, we need to step up efforts to feed our entry-level pipelines. Our complex hiring system often makes this difficult.

Currently, there are a number of ways to get hired into the Federal Government. Even HR Directors are hard pressed to say how you should advise your neighbor's child who is graduating from college to go about

applying for an entry-level Federal job. Previously, the Federal Government relied on the Professional and Administrative Career Examination (PACE) as a primary method for bringing high scoring candidates directly into entry-level career jobs. A high score on that test was a valid predictor of job success, and it was a centralized, transparent process. Unfortunately, the test was shown to have some cultural bias in a 1979 lawsuit and was abandoned. Some agencies have established new occupation-specific tests to replace this exam, but the replacement of the PACE with a valid, entry-level assessment tool has not been adequately addressed Governmentwide since the lawsuit.

Because there is no Governmentwide solution, agencies have turned to the countless alternative hiring authorities to bring on entry-level employees. Many agencies use the "Outstanding Scholar" authority to hire candidates with a 3.5 or higher grade point average (GPA) into certain positions. However, GPA has an extremely low correlation with success in the job. In recent years, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) developed the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP). This authority is a promising method to directly hire people into the Federal excepted service and then, if after two years they are working well, management may decide to convert them to competitive appointments. While the "direct hire" aspects of these authorities make them efficient in bringing talent into the Government, neither of the authorities is transparent. That is, there is no central place for applicants to learn about opportunities as some agencies

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Balancing Act

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use the authorities heavily and some do not use them at all. Furthermore, there are so many different ways to enter Government service that we can't expect applicants to know or understand them all. Thus HR Directors will still have difficulty telling college graduates how to get a Federal job.

To address the concern over how to efficiently hire candidates for Federal entry-level positions while ensuring that competition is fair and open, many agencies are attempting to take matters into their own hands. DoD hopes to address this issue through its new personnel system. The legislation authorizing this system provides DoD with hiring flexibilities beyond those available to the DHS or the rest of the Federal Government. In effect, DoD is being presented an opportunity to wholly redefine its hiring process. Further, some agencies are engaged in "extreme hiring makeovers" to reengineer hiring processes and improve procedures. Agency efforts are experiencing some success as a result of their innovative and diligent work within the existing hiring rules. But are there other ways in which the civil service rules should be updated in this critical area?

Raising problems without offering solutions can be seen as just complaining. Unfortunately, I cannot claim to have "the solution." But certainly the actions agencies are

currently taking to overcome barriers to entry-level hiring hold some ingredients that can fuel potential solutions. For instance, it is clear that we need a central place to consider well-qualified entry-level candidates. In addition, we need a simplified, collective method to select for these common, career entry occupations. I applaud the initiative and innovation of agencies' extreme hiring makeovers. Imagine how much further and faster they could go if we didn't have so many different, complicated ways to get hired for every job and every agency.

The first merit principle calls for fair and open competition. The Government's responsibility to the public calls for efficient hiring systems that result in quality hires. The challenge is to meet both of these goals—which requires a careful balancing act. To achieve that balance, we need to streamline the hiring process and reduce the number of appointing authorities to increase efficiency while ensuring that applicants know where to go to get a Federal job regardless of the authority being used to ensure open competition. ❖

Steve Nelson

Director, Policy and Evaluation

Target Training

(continued from page 1)

resume preparation. Agencies, not vendors, need to stay in the training development driver's seat and clearly specify the objectives of any purchased training.

One-time training. When training is part of an organization-wide change effort, it rolls out with high visibility, strong management support, and wide availability. Everyone is hunted down and trained, resulting in wide dissemination of new skills. If these skills are to take root in the organizational culture, however, training must not disappear after everyone has been trained. If newly hired managers and employees are not also trained, the effect of the initial training will diminish over time due to the natural results of employee attrition. In addition, without the reminder and re-emphasis of refresher training, even the thoroughly trained will drift back to old habits. To maintain its effect, training needs to be ongoing.

Superficial training evaluation. Nothing can cause good training to disappear, or to gradually devolve into mediocre or bad training, as much as poorly implemented

training evaluation. If evaluation is limited to asking participants how much they "like" training,

agencies have no real basis to evaluate it. Agencies need to examine more than how much managers and employees enjoy training, or even how much they have learned by the time it ends. They need to examine how well the learned skills are actually applied. The key question is whether both managers and employees can work effectively under the new personnel system after they have been trained in it. If they can, then the training has done its job. If they cannot, then something needs to be fixed.

Training can play a key role in the successful transition to the new performance-focused personnel systems. The Departments of Defense and Homeland Security have begun well by setting aside funds for training and by developing specifications for its content. Their investment will have the greatest effect if training is designed, implemented, and evaluated effectively. ❖



What is Whistleblowing?

In light of recent discussions in Congress and the media about how to improve whistleblower protections, here is an overview of current Federal whistleblower protections.

Special Byline from Laura Gillespie

Acting Associate Director, Office of Appeals Counsel,
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The Whistleblower Protection Act is designed to protect Federal employees from retaliation for blowing the whistle on waste and abuse. Whistleblowing occurs when an employee makes a protected disclosure of wrongdoing. A protected disclosure is a disclosure of information that shows: 1) a violation of law, rule, or regulation; 2) gross mismanagement; 3) a gross waste of funds; 4) an abuse of authority; or 5) a substantial and specific danger to public health and safety.

A disclosure of any violation of law, rule, or regulation is protected, even if the violation is minor or technical. The violation could be of a Federal or state statute about anything, such as an overtime law, an appropriations statute, or a criminal statute. The violation could be of a Governmentwide regulation—such as one of OPM’s regulations governing Federal pay—or the violation could be of an internal agency regulation or rule.

The gross mismanagement and gross waste of funds categories require a showing of significant wrongdoing. For example, a disclosure of a management decision that creates a substantial risk of significant adverse impact on the agency’s ability to accomplish its mission is protected, but a disclosure of a decision that is merely debatable or foolish is not protected. The decision must create a serious risk that the agency will not be able to accomplish its mission in some important way. People who simply think that management could have made a better decision are not whistleblowers.

Similarly, a **gross waste of funds** occurs when the amount spent is significantly out of proportion to the value of the benefit received. In other words, a person who reports that the Government spent too much on new computers for the office instead of using the money for training is not a whistleblower. However, a person who reports that the Government spent a large portion of the office budget on new computers that do not work might be a whistleblower if he can show that the amount of money involved is significant and the purchase is not merely unwise.

An abuse of authority is an exercise of power that adversely affects someone’s rights or results in

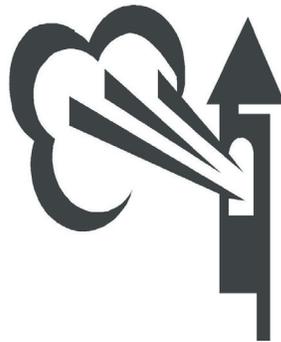
an advantage or personal gain to the wrongdoer or to people he favors. Not every temperamental boss abuses his authority. Likewise, not every unwise management decision amounts to an abuse of authority. For an act to be an abuse of authority, the act must result in a disadvantage to one person or an advantage to another person. Therefore, a claim that a procurement officer was buying goods and services off the books might be an allegation that she violated a law, rule, or regulation, but it would not amount to an abuse of authority if the acts did not result in personal gain to her or anyone else.

The last category of protected disclosure is **“substantial and specific danger to public health and safety.”** The danger to public health and safety cannot be remote or speculative. A report that a wrongdoer permitted unsafe working conditions that

could, someday, lead to an increased risk of harm to some hypothetical person does not reflect a substantial and specific danger to public health and safety. On the other hand, a report that a wrongdoer permits the exposure of employees to a substance known to be toxic does reflect a substantial and specific danger to public health and safety. The key is not how many people might be affected by the

risk, but how big the risk is, how serious the harm is, and how directly the wrongdoing causes the harm.

In deciding whether someone has blown the whistle, it also matters to whom the employee blew the whistle and whether he is blowing the whistle or merely doing his job. An employee can blow the whistle by calling the Inspector General hotline, or talking to the news media, or reporting a problem through the chain of command. However, the whistleblower must report the wrongdoing to someone who can investigate or fix the problem. If the employee’s supervisor is the wrongdoer, reporting the wrongdoing to the wrongdoer herself is not blowing the whistle, but telling *her* boss probably is. Similarly, if an auditor’s job is to examine the books and write a report about what he found, then the act of doing his job and writing up his report is not whistleblowing. If he takes what he found, however, and reports it outside his chain of command, then it is whistleblowing. ❖



Transforming the Organizational Culture to Focus on Performance



The personality of an organization can be changed through its pay system.

Each organization has its own unique personality and way of doing things. These shared norms are commonly known as the organization's "culture." Cultures tend to be remarkably enduring and serve to provide employees with guidance about what to expect when they come to work each day—for example, how communication flows through the organization or whether they should view their peers as collaborators or competitors. This guidance can also serve to promote the achievement of individual and organizational goals by identifying what types of behaviors are desired and how they will be rewarded.

In an ideal situation, employees join organizations with cultures well-suited to their values and needs. If their employer is not a perfect match, employees may be able to adapt to fit the culture. In contrast, changing organizational culture generally requires substantial time and effort due to the long-entrenched norms, behaviors, and traditions that must be changed to overcome organizational inertia.

Nevertheless, organizations can and do change their culture, particularly in response to external pressures from competitors or customers to improve efficiency or service quality. They may also need to drive cultural change following mergers or executive succession. Although these influences on culture have been studied primarily in the private sector, most of them are also relevant to the public sector. In particular, the Federal Government has faced increasing pressure in recent years to provide better services at lower costs, while experiencing unprecedented reorganizations and accompanying changes in leadership—all in the hopes of becoming more results-focused.

At the same time, agencies are increasingly being given the flexibilities to develop new employee compensation systems. These new systems can serve as powerful tools to align organizational culture with the focus on results. In particular, a pay for performance compensation strategy ties salary dollars directly to the achievement of organizational goals, rather than to the traditional basis of pay increases—years of satisfactory performance. As a result, pay for performance "raises the bar" by shifting the emphasis from "getting by" to distinguishing oneself as a top performer. Further, by aligning individual performance objectives with

organizational goals, the agency coordinates the efforts of the workforce to accomplish mission-driven results.

However, these changes don't occur overnight. Agencies must be prepared to invest substantial time, money, and effort into creating an organizational culture consistent with pay for performance. Agency leaders should demonstrate their commitment to a performance-based pay system and ensure that employees understand why it is necessary. Supervisors must be willing and able to distinguish between employees' performance levels, reward them accordingly, and be held accountable if they don't. Employees need to be involved in the development of the system to facilitate buy-in and after implementation as part of the on-going process of communicating with supervisors about performance goals and progress towards achieving them. In this manner, pay for performance can serve to align employee efforts with organizational goals, resulting in a culture that emphasizes performance. ❖

. . . ANNOUNCING . . . Merit Principles Survey 2005 is Here!

Nearly 85,000 Federal civilian employees are receiving the same e-mail message. No, it's not advertising spam from an overzealous software company. And, no, a new employee did not accidentally send a message to allemployees@us.gov. This group of employees is being invited to participate in the Merit Systems Protection Board's (MSPB) Merit Principles Survey 2005 (MPS 2005).

You may be one of these employees. Watch for an e-mail invitation from MSPB's survey contractor, Caliber Associates. This e-mail will provide password access to the MPS 2005 web site. If you decide to complete the web-based questionnaire in a single session, you can expect it to take about 30 minutes. If you need to complete the survey in two sessions, your unique password will allow you re-entry to your survey. The password will also protect the confidentiality of your answers.

MSPB appreciates the time you are taking to describe your views of the Federal civil service in these changing times. If you have questions about the MPS 2005, please visit the MPS web site at www.mspb.gov/studies/mpshome2005.htm or e-mail us at MPSP2005@mspb.gov.

New Personnel Systems

Some Things Old, Some Things New

With so much discussion of the new personnel systems for the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, we decided to offer a brief discussion of what makes these systems different from—as well as what makes them the same as—the current system created by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA). This discussion is not a comprehensive list of all the details but briefly highlights some of the major changes.

What has not changed:

All three systems are required by their authorizing legislation to adhere to the merit system principles and avoid all prohibited personnel practices. Thus, any regulations created in support of these systems must comply with these requirements.

All three systems must also provide the protections of due process to covered employees. MSPB serves as an independent adjudicator for cases involving adverse actions such as lengthy suspensions and removals. The

statutory requirement in this area is different for each of the three systems, but the regulations issued by DHS—and the proposed regulations issued by DoD—retain MSPB as the adjudicatory body for both initial decisions and petitions for review. This has been the Board’s role since the passage of the CSRA. The new systems also opted to retain “preponderance of the evidence” as the standard of proof for conduct-based adverse actions.

What has changed: The table below summarizes changes related to regulation formation, pay, and performance. Labor relations is an area that is also subject to major changes but is not discussed here.

These changes are based upon the final regulations issued by DHS and the proposed regulations issued by DoD. Therefore, they are still subject to further modification. We encourage readers to refer to the regulations for further detail. ❖

	CSRA	DoD	DHS
Formulation of Regulations	Statute sets forth general instructions and directs OPM to create implementing regulations. Where the implementing authority lies elsewhere, such as MSPB or FLRA, that independent agency has the responsibility to create the appropriate regulations.	Statute sets forth core principles but in less detail than the CSRA. Instructs individual departments to work with OPM to jointly create implementing regulations.	
Pay Setting	Classification is based upon a set of guidelines issued by OPM in keeping with directions that preceded the CSRA. Pay is based upon a combination of the classification and tenure, with minor adjustments possible based upon past performance or superior qualifications at the time of hire.	Pay will be determined by the nature of the duties and the performance of the individual. Salaries will also be affected by such factors as labor market conditions.	
Penalty for Adverse Actions	Twelve factors established by a 1981 case (Douglas vs. Veterans Administration) are used to assess the reasonableness of a penalty. MSPB may mitigate (i.e., reduce) penalties that do not meet this test, although this is rare.	A penalty can be mitigated by the MSPB only if the penalty is so disproportionate to the basis for the action that it is wholly without justification. If mitigation occurs, the maximum justifiable penalty must be used.	
Performance-Based Adverse Actions	A performance-based adverse action must be supported by substantial evidence.	A performance-based adverse action has the same standard of proof as a conduct-based adverse action—preponderance of the evidence.	

A Business Case for the Probationary Period

In a study soon to be released on the Federal probationary period, MSPB found that most supervisors understand the purpose of the probationary period—to serve as the final assessment in the employee selection process. Unfortunately, many of them still did not act upon their final assessment of their probationers. This is a troubling finding.

The probationary period (called the trial period for excepted service appointments) gives supervisors an opportunity to ensure the Government gets its money's worth from its new employees. As the last phase of the assessment process, the probationary period gives supervisors the opportunity to ensure they made a good selection and, if necessary, correct the assessment process used for selection.

During the probationary period, supervisors can observe—up close and personal—an applicant's conduct and performance before deciding to finalize the individual's appointment. The stakes are high: if a high-performing employee is retained, the long-term benefits to the civil service are enormous. The opposite is true if a marginal or poorly performing employee is retained.

This is a strong business case for using the probationary period, and we encourage supervisors to use it wisely.

How can supervisors ensure that the probationary period will enable them to retain the individual who is right for the job? By allowing probationers to fully demonstrate on the job the characteristics that led to their selection. For example, supervisors of Federal Career Interns recently told us that interpersonal, analytical, writing, and leadership abilities are key skills they look for when selecting applicants. So it makes good business sense for supervisors to ensure that probationers demonstrate—and supervisors observe—these skills and abilities during the probationary or trial period.

Obviously, the skills to be assessed should be driven by the job analysis and will vary by position. The point is that supervisors should give probationers work assignments that enable them to demonstrate the competencies for which they were selected. Otherwise, supervisors may make hiring decisions that can become costly to the Government and unfair to employees who does not have the potential to succeed on the job. ❖

Technology in Hiring: Proceed with Caution

Recently, a few agencies' automated hiring systems were disrupted due to unexpected surges in activity. While this is great news for agency recruiters, it is not such good news for those relying on the automated systems. As reported in our recent study, *Identifying Talent Through Technology*, automation can create great benefits, but it can also incur some risk.

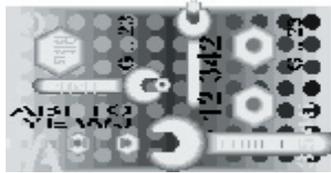
Automated systems perform—and fail—differently than people. Automation is free of many human failings. People can tire, overlook things, and make judgment errors. Information systems are tireless, thorough, and impartial (within the bounds of their programming). But people rarely “crash.” Information systems do—and the consequences can be serious and wide-ranging. Thus, while it is important that agencies fully understand the benefits of technology, it is also important that they understand its limitations and risks.

Contingency planning is essential. We are not suggesting that agencies avoid the use of technology in the hiring process. Rather, agencies should understand that automated systems bring new risks as well as new

opportunities. To manage those risks, HR professionals will need to think about problems that could occur, take steps to limit any resulting disruption, and develop plans for recovery. This means working with other organizations in the agency on issues outside HR's sphere of expertise, such as continuity of operations, information systems design, and contract management. Hiring is a critical business process, and one for which HR must share responsibility.

The human side matters. Technology can make the hiring process easier and faster. However, ease of application and timely job offers are not the only things that matter to applicants. Applicants also care about how they are treated. Even minor technological “glitches” can do major damage to an agency's image and recruitment success, particularly if those glitches result in lost applications, erroneous communications, or poor service. For this reason, agencies using automated hiring systems should consider the applicant's perspective when developing contingency plans. It will do little good to save the data if the applicants are lost. ❖

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



The Management Benefits of Telework

When you think of telework, what comes to mind? Family-friendly? Reduced traffic and pollution? Congressional mandate? All perfectly reasonable—but they overlook the advantages telework holds for the organization. Here is a short list of reasons for agencies and managers to actively identify and offer telework opportunities.

Performance. Too often, discussions about telework focus on what can go wrong: “How do I know my employee isn’t napping? Raiding the refrigerator? Watching television?” The telework environment does have its temptations, but it is also free of many of the distractions of the office, including ringing telephones, fire drills, and the water cooler. For this reason, a disciplined and dedicated employee may actually do better work outside the office.

Productivity. Often, telework’s flexibility is presented as a benefit to the employee. Clearly it is. But telework’s flexibility also benefits the agency and the public. In many situations—such as inclement weather, school closings, or an employee recovering from illness—the alternative to telework is no work at all.

Recruitment. The flexibility of telework can be a valuable weapon in the “battle for talent.” Competitive pay and benefits, learning opportunities, and meaningful work are important—but prospective employees also consider quality of life when evaluating employment offers. Employers who offer ways for employees to balance their work and personal lives can gain a real edge over less flexible competitors.

Retention. Employees’ lives and needs are not static. A hard-driving, high-performing employee who has come to the office every day for years may suddenly need alternatives to a fixed schedule and fixed work site. Telework could make the difference between retention and resignation (or retirement).

We realize that telework is not always feasible. For example, firefighters cannot extinguish fires from a home office, and Federal executives cannot testify before Congress by telephone. But telework is possible and practical for many jobs—and for those jobs, its benefits can far outweigh any associated cost or inconvenience. ❖

Leave Flexibilities in Title 5

The sixth in our series on Federal human resources management flexibilities, this chart shows leave flexibilities, in addition to normal sick and annual leave, which are available to employees to help them enjoy a balanced work and home life.

Flexibility	Description
Expanded sick leave policies	Employees may use up to 12 weeks of paid sick leave each year to care for a family member with a serious health condition. In addition, employees may use limited amounts of paid sick leave (5–13 days) to take family members to doctor appointments, arrange or attend the funeral of a family member, or to adopt a child.
The Family and Medical Leave Act	This act entitles employees to use up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period due to illness, to care for a newborn or adopted child, or to care for a family member with a serious health condition. While on family and medical leave, employees are still covered by the Government’s health insurance program.
Leave sharing programs	Employees who have a personal or family medical emergency and who have exhausted their leave may receive donated annual leave from other Federal employees through the voluntary leave transfer or leave bank programs.
Leave for bone-marrow and organ donation	Employees are permitted to use up to 7 days of paid leave each year (in addition to sick or annual leave) to serve as bone-marrow donors and up to 30 days of paid leave as organ donors.
Time off for volunteer activities	Agencies may permit employees to use annual leave, compensatory time-off, or administrative leave, if appropriate, to perform community service.

Changes Coming for SCEP



OPM is trying to make it easier for agencies to convert student interns.

MSPB has long encouraged Federal agencies to use intern programs to help meet workforce needs, and OPM is making this goal easier to achieve. OPM recently proposed changes to the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) that give agencies more flexibility in recruiting and retaining talented students. The changes will allow credit to be given for certain non-Federal internships or military service toward the minimum time needed under a SCEP appointment to qualify for a permanent Federal job.

The SCEP permits agencies to appoint students to excepted service positions where they gain work experience related to their academic study—similar to the co-operative education program it replaced. When students complete their schooling and meet the minimum number of required work hours in the work-study program, agencies can non-competitively convert them to career or career-conditional positions in the competitive service. In addition to giving the student valuable work experience, SCEP gives agencies the opportunity to assess the student's performance in real work situations and determine his or her potential as a permanent employee.

Specifically, the changes OPM proposes will:

1. Allow agencies to credit up to half of the required 640 hours of job-related experience gained in other (non-Federal) formal work-study programs toward the minimum needed under a SCEP appointment to qualify for a permanent Federal job.
2. Allow agencies to credit a student's job-related experience gained as an active duty member of the armed forces, including the National Guard or the Reserves.
3. Permit an agency to waive up to one-half of the required work experience hours for students who have exceptional job performance and academic excellence while enrolled in the work-study program.

These new flexibilities will assist agencies in hiring high-potential graduates for entry-level positions in the civil service. However, agencies are cautioned that the flexibilities must be implemented with sufficient rigor to ensure that the experience or performance credited to interns meets the program's intent—bringing high quality, well-educated graduates into the Federal workforce. ❖

. . . KEEP ON THE LOOKOUT. . .

MSPB's Office of Policy and Evaluation has been very busy this year. As a result, we have a number of studies in the process of being published. Sign up for our LISTSERV to receive notification when they have been published by clicking on MSPB Studies at www.mspb.gov.

Using Pay for Performance to Effectively Recruit, Retain, and Motivate the Workforce.

This report provides an overview of pay for performance and the functions it can play in today's Federal Government.

The Probationary Period: A Critical Assessment Opportunity. This study examines agencies' use of the probationary period as an assessment tool and provides recommendations on how it can be used more effectively.

Building a Quality Workforce: The Federal Career Intern Program. The report is an early look at how agencies recruit, select, and retain Federal Career Interns and how well the program has helped agencies meet their workforce needs.

Reference Checks. This report discusses how reference checking can best be used in hiring decisions and explores the different roles that job applicants, hiring officials, and reference providers play in effective reference checks.



FedScope Answers Many Workforce Questions

Workforce data is easier than ever to access.

Do you want to know the total number of Federal civilian employees? Do you need to know how the percentage of women in your agency's workforce compares to that of other agencies? Should you know what occupations had the most separations in the last year or how the percentage of 55–59 year olds changed in the last five years? If so, the answers to these and countless other workforce questions are just a few clicks away on FedScope.

FedScope is OPM's web-based querying tool that helps to answer common Federal workforce questions. It is relatively easy to use and gives Government agencies, researchers, the media, and the general public the ability to immediately access and analyze many of the most popular data elements in the Central Personnel Data File (CPDF). The CPDF is the Government's massive database containing records for the Government's approximately 1.8 million civilian employees and the personnel actions involving those employees.

Among the data elements featured in FedScope are "who," "what," and "where" elements, such as agency, location, occupation, gender, age, length of service, type of appointment, pay plan and grade, and salary level. Each element can be broken out in numerous combinations, and data can be searched at the sub-component level of the agency. A useful feature of FedScope allows users to view and analyze employment trends over the last five years. However, to ensure individual privacy, age and length of service data are clustered in 5-year intervals, and FedScope excludes data on race and national origin.

In addition to the "who," "what," and "where" elements of the system, FedScope features accessions (new hires and transfers into agencies) and separations (transfers out of agencies, quits, retirements, layoffs, removals, and deaths). Unfortunately, unlike the employment statistics, FedScope does not as readily reveal 5-year accession or separation trends and users must access these data separately for each year of interest.

FedScope is extremely flexible in its ability to filter and sort data; display, hide, or swap rows and columns; show data as actual values or percentages; suppress

unwanted data; and display results graphically. Results can be readily exported, bookmarked, or printed. Time invested in experimenting and becoming familiar with these features is well worth the effort.

Last, but not least, FedScope's supporting materials deserve special mention.

The instructions, definitions, help, and Frequently Asked Questions are clear and easy to follow. FedScope includes an offer of assistance from OPM's workforce information staff in the use of the data. This is not to be taken lightly, since the FedScope query system is complex and results can be misinterpreted by users unfamiliar with its limitations. While extremely useful

as a tool for exploring employment relationships and trends, it is not a substitute for the more precise, current, and accurate workforce statistics required for real-time employment decisions in the agencies. Nevertheless, FedScope can help to answer many relevant workforce questions.

So, next time you have questions about the employment characteristics and trends of the Federal workforce, get online. You are likely to find many of the answers you need right there on FedScope: www.fedscope.opm.gov. ❖



Focus on the Facts

Is the HR Workforce Shrinking?

Fiction: HR professionals are an endangered species, with declining numbers and a shrinking habitat.

Fact: The Federal HR workforce has been remarkably stable over the last several years. At the end of FY 1998, the 23 major agencies employed approximately 33,900 HR specialists and assistants. At the end of FY 2004, that number was 33,300—a decline of less than two percent. And, during that time, the number of HR specialists actually increased; from 19,200 to just over 21,000.

Source: Central Personnel Data File.



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ISSUES OF MERIT

June 2005

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