

This material is part of a collection that documents the harassment, discrimination, and retaliation perpetrated against Alaska's women research scientists by their supervisor, with full knowledge (and arguably, "tacit approval") of their federal employer, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

From: Pantoja, Alberto
Sent: Tue 7/15/2008 10:27 AM
To: alberto.pantoja@ars.usda.gov; Cindy Bower (Cindy.Bower@ars.usda.gov); Peter Bechtel (Peter.Bechteler@ARS.USDA.GOV); Ted Wu (Ted.Wu@ARS.USDA.GOV); Bonnie Furman (Bonnie.Furman@ARS.USDA.GOV); Joe C Kuhl (joe.kuhl@ars.usda.gov); Nancy L. Robertson (nancy.robertson@ars.usda.gov); Dennis Fielding (Dennis.Fielding@ARS.USDA.GOV); Jeff Conn (Jeff.Conn@ARS.USDA.GOV); Lori Winton (Lori.Winton@ARS.USDA.GOV); Steven Seefeldt

Cc: Jang, Eric; Alberto Pantoja (apantoja@pw.ars.usda.gov); Janis Contento (jcontento@pw.ars.usda.gov)

Subject: FW: RPES training

To: SY's

Eric Jang will be our resource person for the RPES training in September.

Eric is willing to review individual case write up and present his recommendations. This is an excellent opportunity to fine tune your case write-ups' and get advice from a Panel Chair. Eric information is below.

Eric Jang, Research Leader
Tropical Plant Pests Research Unit
U.S. Pacific Basin Agric. Res. Center
P.O. Box 4459
Hilo, Hawaii 96720 USA
808.959.4340 (voice)
808.959.4319 (FAX)
email: eric.jang@ars.usda.gov
<http://pbarc.ars.usda.gov>

In September 2008, Dr. Eric Jang, an experienced panel chair for RPES, presented promotion information to SARU personnel in Fairbanks, Alaska. During his presentation Dr. Jang admitted that the RPE panel (for promoting scientists) makes a correct determination only about two times out of three. Dr. Jang, a GS-15, showed no concern or remorse concerning these statistics and offered no apology for the one-out-of-three scientists whose careers were damaged by the inaccuracy of the secret panel deliberations.

From: Bower, Cindy
Sent: Tuesday, July 15, 2008 9:18 PM
To: Jang, Eric
Cc: Pantoja, Alberto
Subject: FW: RPES training

Eric Jang
Tropical Plant Pests Research Unit

P.O. Box 4459
Hilo, Hawaii 96720 USA
eric.jang@ars.usda.gov

Dr. Jang,

Our unit just received an email that you will be our resource person for the RPES training in September. We're looking forward to your visit.

I'm sending you this email in advance since last May I received a personal mandate from Dr. Knipling (ARS Administrator) "to fully understand the RPES position classification process and to ask additional questions about it." Since there will be insufficient time for my questions during your presentation, I was hoping that you could address some of them prior to September. Alternately, this will help you prepare for my individual meeting with you that the RL has offered to arrange for all the Alaska SYs.

1.) During my initial hiring, an ad hoc RPES panel was given an officially classified GS 13/14 Position Description, but chose to assign GS 12 point values to Factors 1 and 2 of that PD, resulting in sufficiently low numbers to devalue my 10 years as a PhD level research scientist into a GS 12 position. In your service as Panel Chair, how common is it for the panel to lower the numbers on Factors 1 and 2 of legally certified PDs? I broached the subject with Dr. Knipling himself, and he appears to heartily condone the practice, (leading me to believe that it occurs often). Do you have any approximate statistics for how many SYs are downgraded each year using this method (rather than lowering Factors 3 and 4), and can you offer any justification for this practice?

2.) Based on my experiences, RPES panel results provide no meaningful information when a Remain-in-Grade decision is issued, despite written ARS statements to the contrary. For each factor, my "glowing" case write-up was paraphrased back, followed merely by the Level rating with no additional information. My RL, an experienced panel member, explained that I needed to "read between the lines" to see that they were telling me I lacked recency in my publications. Could you please provide a reference to the ARS P&P manual that translates these unwritten comments into something intelligible to the rest of us? Also, I have only seen this happen with the case write-ups of women SYs. Can you verify that panels occasionally withhold this career-building information from men as well?

3.) A common theme in the EEOC cases listed on the web is that ARS supervisory personnel did not allocate resources equally among scientists (e.g., lower GS level technicians, including term rather than permanent technician positions to ensure continual disruption of research through employee turnover,

For many years, all the women research scientists working for the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Alaska had been filing complaints about the harassing and discriminatory treatment being perpetrated against them by their supervisor (Dr. Alberto Pantoja).

The following email exchange demonstrates how the agency's promotion system contributes to the disparate treatment of women.

etc.). What methods do you employ, as a Panel Chair, to verify that an equitable situation exists for each SY you evaluate, to ensure that you aren't unwittingly fulfilling the goals of ARS supervisors engaging in EEO-prohibited activities to damage the stature of their subordinates?

It is a fact that the ARS does not recruit, promote, and/or retain women scientists at the same rate as the men. Since you're representing the "promotion" piece of the puzzle, I am very interested in your upcoming seminar in September.

We'll see you then.

Cindy

Cindy Bower
USDA Agricultural Research Service
356 O'Neill Building
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, AK 99775-7200
Phone: (907) 474-6732
Email: Bower@sfos.uaf.edu

From: Jang, Eric
Sent: Wed 7/16/2008 10:39 AM
To: Bower, Cindy
Cc: Pantoja, Alberto
Subject: RE: RPES training

Hi Cindy

Thank you for your email

I'm afraid that I don't have specific answers to most of your questions and suggest you route these through your RL and Area Office for guidance

What I hope to provide you with is an overview of the RPES process, especially preparation of case write ups as I know it and share with you my experiences as panel chair.

Lokking forward to meeting you next month

Aloha

Eric

Eric Jang, Research Leader

Tropical Plant Pests Research Unit
U.S. Pacific Basin Agric. Res. Center
P.O. Box 4459
Hilo, Hawaii 96720 USA
808.959.4340 (voice)
808.959.4319 (FAX)
email: eric.jang@ars.usda.gov
<http://pbarc.ars.usda.gov>

From: Bower, Cindy
Sent: Wednesday, July 16, 2008 9:29 AM
To: Pantoja, Alberto
Cc: Matteri, Robert; Jang, Eric
Subject: FW: RPES training

Alberto,

I just received a reply from Eric Jang. He was unable to answer my questions and suggested that I route them through you and Area personnel for guidance. Who can I contact to help me fulfill Dr. Knipling's directive: "to fully understand the RPES position classification process and to ask additional questions about it"? I have previously broached these subjects with ARS personnel. One of my communique actually generated a written threat of reprisal from the PWA. I find it frustrating to be continually redirected while trying to fulfill Dr. Knipling's request. Can you suggest someone who will be able to answer my questions concerning the RPES process? Thank you.

Cindy

From: Pantoja, Alberto Sent: Wed 7/16/2008 7:14 AM
To: Bower, Cindy; Jang, Eric
Cc: Alberto Pantoja (apantoja@pw.ars.usda.gov); Janis Contento (jcontento@pw.ars.usda.gov)
Subject: RE: RPES training

Cindy

We are building an agenda with the opportunity to meet one-on-one with Eric; details will be available soon.

alberto

From: Pantoja, Alberto
Sent: Wed 7/16/2008 12:30 PM
To: Bower, Cindy

Cc: Matteri, Robert; Jang, Eric; Cole, Merle
Subject: RE: RPES training

Cindy

I suggest Merle Cole. He is being copied this email; his data appear below

Hope this helps

alberto

Cole, Merle <<http://www.ars.usda.gov/pandp/people/people.htm?personid=9655>>
(301) 504-1563
merle.cole@ars.usda.gov
Personnel Management

From: Bower, Cindy
Sent: Wednesday, July 16, 2008 2:43 PM
To: Pantoja, Alberto
Cc: Matteri, Robert; Jang, Eric; Cole, Merle
Subject: RE: RPES training

Thanks Alberto,

I'll contact Merle Cole for my answers.

Cindy

From: Cindy.Bower@ars.usda.gov
Subject: FW: RPES training
Date: July 16, 2008 10:56:31 AM GMT-08:00
To: Merle.Cole@ARS.USDA.GOV

Merle Cole
Human Resources Specialist
(301) 504-1563
merle.cole@ars.usda.gov

Merle,

Your name was suggested by my research leader as someone who could address the questions I have concerning the RPE system. My queries (listed in an earlier part of this email thread) were originally sent to Eric Jang, so that he could consider them prior to his scheduled RPES seminar here in Fairbanks. If

you have any information you can share, I'd appreciate hearing your explanations.

Thanks,

Cindy

Cindy Bower
USDA Agricultural Research Service
356 O'Neill Building
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, AK 99775-7200
Phone: (907) 474-6732
Email: Bower@sfos.uaf.edu

From: Cole, Merle
Sent: Thu 7/17/2008 5:08 AM
To: Bower, Cindy
Cc: Matteri, Robert; Jang, Eric; Pantoja, Alberto
Subject: RE: RPES training

Details about RPES operations are provided on our web site at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes/>. Although each section has useful information, I would invite particular attention to materials in the Tips for First Timers section at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes/tips%20for%20first%20timers.htm>.

Regarding the specific questions in your initial query, I have embedded my responses in blue following each question below.

I trust this information will be useful.

Merle T. Cole
Head, Research Position Evaluation Staff
ARS Human Resources Division
301-504-1563

Dr. Jang,

Our unit just received an email that you will be our resource person for the RPES training in September. We're looking forward to your visit.

I'm sending you this email in advance since last May I received a personal mandate from Dr. Knipling (ARS Administrator) "to fully understand the RPES position classification process and to ask additional questions about

My position was **officially** classified by OPM as GS 13/14.

It was not offered as a GS 12/13/14.

It was a GS 13/14 position.

The ARS offered it to me as a GS 12.

The GS level of the position was "downgraded" from GS 13/14 to GS 12 when it was offered to me, even though my h-index (scientific impact rating based on objective, measurable criteria) was over twice that of my GS-15 supervisor, (Dr. Alberto Pantoja).

Merle Cole seems unaware that the RGEG manual contains no objective, measurable "RGEG criteria", (i.e. it allows the panel members to subjectively assign GS levels based on their own feelings, beliefs, and personal biases).

it." Since there will be insufficient time for my questions during your presentation, I was hoping that you could address some of them prior to September. Alternately, this will help you prepare for my individual meeting with you that the RL has offered to arrange for all the Alaska SYs.

1.) During my initial hiring, an ad hoc RPES panel was given an officially classified GS 13/14 Position Description, but chose to assign GS 12 point values to Factors 1 and 2 of that PD, resulting in sufficiently low numbers to devalue my 10 years as a PhD level research scientist into a GS 12 position. In your service as Panel Chair, how common is it for the panel to lower the numbers on Factors 1 and 2 of legally certified PDs? I broached the subject with Dr. Knipling himself, and he appears to heartily condone the practice, (leading me to believe that it occurs often). Do you have any approximate statistics for how many SYs are downgraded each year using this method (rather than lowering Factors 3 and 4), and can you offer any justification for this practice?

Research vacancies are usually advertised at multiple grade levels, with the final grade dependent upon an assessment of the selectee's impact in terms of OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG) criteria. Use of the term "downgrade" is thus inappropriate, because no firm grade level can be determined until a selection is made. In any event, "downgrade" only applies to occupied positions-not vacancies. Therefore, there are no statistics about such "downgrades."

2.) Based on my experiences, RPES panel results provide no meaningful information when a Remain-in-Grade decision is issued, despite written ARS statements to the contrary. For each factor, my "glowing" case write-up was paraphrased back, followed merely by the Level rating with no additional information. My RL, an experienced panel member, explained that I needed to "read between the lines" to see that they were telling me I lacked recency in my publications. Could you please provide a reference to the ARS P&P manual that translates these unwritten comments into something intelligible to the rest of us? Also, I have only seen this happen with the case write-ups of women SYs. Can you verify that panels occasionally withhold this career-building information from men as well?

The function of RPES is to classify research positions using RGEG criteria; it is not a career management system. RPES panel reports simply summarize why a position is graded as it is, not why some other grade is not appropriate. As noted on page 48 of Manual 431.3-ARS, "Panels cannot make statements binding on future panel decisions, so reports will not "explain what a scientist needs to do to get promoted." Reports will, however, identify grade-threatening deficiencies which

Sadly, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) allowed a GS-15 supervisor to unlawfully discriminate against **all** the women research scientists in ARS's Alaska unit without his unlawful activities being identified as a "grade-threatening deficiency".

should be addressed before the next cyclic review."
(<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/431-3m-ARS.pdf>.)

3.) A common theme in the EEOC cases listed on the web is that ARS supervisory personnel did not allocate resources equally among scientists (e.g., lower GS level technicians, including term rather than permanent technician positions to ensure continual disruption of research through employee turnover, etc.). What methods do you employ, as a Panel Chair, to verify that an equitable situation exists for each SY you evaluate, to ensure that you aren't unwittingly fulfilling the goals of ARS supervisors engaging in EEO-prohibited activities to damage the stature of their subordinates?

Merle Cole's statement is clearly false, since decreased resources (e.g. technical personnel, equipment purchases, collaborative agreements, and funding for travel), when combined with denied opportunities, very much affect how an RPES panel might judge a scientist's career.

RPES panels grade positions based on application of RGEG classification criteria. Resource equity (or the lack thereof) is a management issue, not a classification criterion, so it is irrelevant for RGEG application.

It is a fact that the ARS does not recruit, promote, and/or retain women scientists at the same rate as the men. Since you're representing the "promotion" piece of the puzzle, I am very interested in your upcoming seminar in September.

I cannot speak to recruitment and retention rates, as those are not within RPES jurisdiction. However:

- There are currently 1,937 Category 1 employees-354 (18.3%) female and 1,583 (81.7%) male.
- The Upgrade rate for female researchers is 50.3%; for males, 44.0%.
- 18.7% of RPES panelists are female, as are 33.3% of panel Chairs.
- Females constitute 37.5% of RPES Advisory Committee membership.

We'll see you then.

Cindy

Women scientists in the ARS would greatly benefit from a promotion system that uses objective measurable criteria, rather than the currently used RGEG method, which is based on the subjectivity of panel members.

Statistics can be deceptive:

Men already hold most of the (top-level) GS-15 positions, so they won't be increasing in rank, (hence the seemingly lower upgrade rate); whereas the women seem to be recruited at lower GS-levels, and are held in-grade longer, (and yet according to these statistics, only half of them received promotions).

From: "Bower, Cindy" <Cindy.Bower@ars.usda.gov>
Date: July 17, 2008 11:50:25 PM GMT-08:00
To: "Cole, Merle" Merle.Cole@ARS.USDA.GOV
Subject: RE: RPES training
Merle,

Thank you for your response to the RPES questions I emailed. I'm hoping that you can provide further clarification concerning those issues:

1.) I applied for a GS 13/14 level position. [Please note: it was NOT advertised as 12/13]. I successfully qualified for the "certificate of eligibles" list and easily met the point-value requirements for GS 13 according to RPES Evaluation Criteria (factor and level definitions). The GS 12 level classification describes new scientists and recent post-docs, not scientists who have been publishing their research for over a decade.

- The OPM Classifier's Handbook clearly states: "It is the position that is classified, not the person assigned to it."

- The RPES panel took possession of an officially classified GS 13/14 Position Description and assigned GS 12 point values to Factors 1 and 2 of that PD. (I had no control over Factors 1 and 2, since they were derived from the PD.)

- The PD represented an officially classified position (GS 13/14), therefore the RPES panel should have automatically assigned at least 6 points each to Factors 1 and 2, REGARDLESS OF WHICH QUALIFIED APPLICANT WAS SELECTED FOR THE POSITION.

What I was looking for from you was some acknowledgement that lowering Factors 1 and 2 of an officially classified Position Description represents a classification error. Can you at least offer a justification for this practice?

2.) Position classification through the RPE system serves to ensure equal pay for substantially equal work. The GS "Grade" defines the level of difficulty and responsibility, and it does in fact provide a basis for recruiting, placing, compensating, training, reassigning, and promoting employees. RPES may not be an adequate tool for career management, but it is the de facto system for promotion. (Is there any other method?)

PhD-level scientists are held to excruciatingly high standards, compared to similar-salaried ARS employees without PhDs. The (unofficial) litmus test for a competent scientist is the basic recognition that RPES is embarrassingly subjective (different resources allocated to different SYs, no existing lab or technical help for some while others are hired into established teams, etc...). The system is also vulnerable to biased input and other agency abuses. The RPES manual (431.3-ARS, p 42) instructs panel members to "... compose a brief factor rationale summary for each factor stating why a given level has been assigned. This statement must be phrased in relation to RGEG criteria for the appropriate level. An additional statement will be required to summarize a Level B or D rating. " In my case, no meaningful feedback was provided, nor were there any additional statements of relevance explaining the Level B ratings.

I now recognize that my question was outside your area of expertise, but I was justifiably dismayed to learn that panels are not held to the standards outlined for them in the RPES manual.

3.) With this question, I raised a valid concern. There does not seem to be a system in place to compensate for anti-EEO actions that can damage a scientist's career. The prevailing attitude (enforced through RPES) is that each scientist is wholly to blame for the situation they find themselves hired into.

I appreciated receiving the statistics. The Category 1 employee breakdown (a mere 18.3% female) is probably even more appalling when broken down by GS level. Can you send me the Cat-1 breakdown by gender and GS level for the Pacific West Area as well as for the entire ARS? Also, do you have the male/female upgrade rates for the last 5 years for the PWA, again broken down by year, gender and GS level?

Thanks for any information you can provide.

Cindy

From: Cole, Merle
Sent: Mon 7/21/2008 8:02 AM
To: Bower, Cindy
Cc: Matteri, Robert; Pantoja, Alberto; Jang, Eric
Subject: RE: RPES training

I chopped off the earlier parts of the e-mail stream as it was getting unwieldy.

My responses are embedded in blue font below.

Merle T. Cole
Head, Research Position Evaluation Staff
ARS Human Resources Division
301-504-1563

-----Original Message-----

From: Bower, Cindy
Sent: Friday, July 18, 2008 3:50 AM
To: Cole, Merle
Subject: RE: RPES training

Merle,

Thank you for your response to the RPES questions I emailed. I'm hoping that you can provide further clarification concerning those issues:

This is deceptive wording, since the RGEg manual does not contain objective, measurable criteria for making grade-level decisions.

1.) I applied for a GS 13/14 level position. [Please note: it was NOT advertised as 12/13]. I successfully qualified for the "certificate of eligibles" list and easily met the point-value requirements for GS 13 according to RPES Evaluation Criteria (factor and level definitions). The GS 12 level classification describes new scientists and recent post-docs, not scientists who have been publishing their research for over a decade.

Ad hoc panels are convened to assess a selectee's impact and make grade-level decisions using RGEg criteria. The panel's determination is not constrained by the grade level(s) at which a vacancy may have been advertised.

For a new hire, Factors 1 and 2 (of the job applicant's write-up) are provided "by the supervisor" as a description of the position.

The appropriate grade for a newly-minted Ph.D. is GS-11, not GS-12. Further, publishing one's work is not a deciding feature in RGEg application; all aspects of impact, stature, and recognition are assessed under RGEg criteria.

Remember, there are no objective, measurable RGEg criteria

Without objective RGEg criteria to measure a selectee's prior impact, a hiring Panel cannot (fairly) evaluate the candidate's future potential.

Qualification standards and classification standards use different criteria. That means that a person may be "qualified" for a given grade level under a qualification standard, but not reach that grade under the classification standard criteria.

- The OPM Classifier's Handbook clearly states: "It is the position that is classified, not the person assigned to it."

...and yet, there is no objective way to measure whether a person meets the "classification standard" criteria, either.

Panel biases (leading to unlawful hiring practices) would be a predictable outcome when subjective methods of evaluation are applied.

The Classifier's Handbook applies to positions across all occupations, and the person assigned to a position is usually irrelevant. However, as noted on page 40 of that same Handbook, the "impact of the person on the job" concept applies in grading of positions in certain occupations (among them research scientists).

- The RPES panel took possession of an officially classified GS 13/14 Position Description and assigned GS 12 point values to Factors 1 and 2 of that PD. (I had no control over Factors 1 and 2, since they were derived from the PD.)

...and yet, the ARS has no objective way to measure "the impact of the person on the job", (and too few employees who can distinguish an objective system from a biased one).

The practice of hiring new employees at lower-than-warranted salaries persists, since it usually "frees up" extra resources, which the supervisor is then able to exploit.

Position descriptions used for advertising vacancies are merely tentatively classified. As noted above, the final grade determination cannot be made until a selectee's impact is assessed.

Sorry, Merle, but OPM doesn't mean "tentative" when they "officially" classify a position.

As previously noted, the ARS never measures a "selectee's impact" using objective, measurable criteria, (i.e. the system was designed to allow biases on factors such as gender).

- The PD represented an officially classified position (GS 13/14), therefore the RPES panel should have automatically assigned at least 6 points each to Factors 1 and 2, REGARDLESS OF WHICH QUALIFIED APPLICANT WAS SELECTED FOR THE POSITION.

What I was looking for from you was some acknowledgement that lowering Factors 1 and 2 of an officially classified Position Description represents a classification error. Can you at least offer a justification for this practice?

As noted above, the classification of vacant positions is merely tentative, final grade level determination is made by the panel applying RGEG criteria, and the panel decision is not constrained by the grades at which the vacancy may have been advertised. Given these facts, no classification error occurred.

[Does it seem ethical to just string a series of refutable statements together and then magically pronounce them to be "facts"?]

2.) Position classification through the RPE system serves to ensure equal pay for substantially equal work. The GS "Grade" defines the level of difficulty and responsibility, and it does in fact provide a basis for recruiting, placing, compensating, training, reassigning, and promoting employees. RPES may not be an adequate tool for career management, but it is the de facto system for promotion. (Is there any other method?)

False

RPES is the *de facto* promotion system (since there is no other way for an ARS scientist to be promoted)

RPES is a position classification function under Title 5 USC. It has no other purpose. A research scientist can attain promotion by applying for other positions, just like any other Federal employee can.

It sounds as though Merle Cole is inviting employees who've been targeted for discrimination within the USDA Agricultural Research Service to simply quit their jobs (i.e. apply for another position).

PhD-level scientists are held to excruciatingly high standards, compared to similar-salaried ARS employees without PhDs. The (unofficial) litmus test for a competent scientist is the basic recognition that RPES is embarrassingly subjective (different resources allocated to different SYs, no existing lab or technical help for some while others are hired into established teams, etc.). The system is also vulnerable to biased input and other agency abuses. The RPES manual (431.3-ARS, p 42) instructs panel members to ". compose a brief factor rationale summary for each factor stating why a given level has been assigned. This statement must be phrased in relation to RGEG criteria for the appropriate level. An additional statement will be required to summarize a Level B or D rating." In my case, no meaningful feedback was provided, nor were there any additional statements of relevance explaining the Level B ratings.

[Doesn't that sound like just another method for delaying the implementation of Title VII (Civil Rights) in the ARS?]

Each factor in an RPES panel report contains a brief (1-sentence) factor summary statement relating the factor assignment to RGEG criteria.

I now recognize that my question was outside your area of expertise, but I was justifiably dismayed to learn that panels are not held to the standards outlined for them in the RPES manual.

All panels are required to generate reports meeting minimal classification adequacy standards.

3.) With this question, I raised a valid concern. There does not seem to be a system in place to compensate for anti-EEO actions that can damage a scientist's career. The prevailing attitude (enforced through RPES) is that each scientist is wholly to blame for the situation they find themselves hired into.

RPES is a position classification system. If a scientist is dissatisfied with the outcome of a panel review, they are free to request reevaluation or early review (such requests are decided by the Area Director), or to file a position classification appeal with either USDA or OPM (see P&P 431.3, Section 9, at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/PDF/431-01.pdf>).

I appreciated receiving the statistics. The Category 1 employee breakdown (a mere 18.3% female) is probably even more appalling when broken down by GS level. Can you send me the Cat-1 breakdown by gender and GS level for the Pacific West Area as well as for the entire ARS? Also, do you have the male/female upgrade rates for the last 5 years for the PWA, again broken down by year, gender and GS level?

The data breakout you request (UPG by sex/grade for ARS and PWA for the last 5 years) is not readily available. The proper channel for such requests is the ARS FOIA Officer.

ARS-wide panel decision data by grade level from FY 1992-FY 2007 are published on our web site at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/rpes/files/Decision-Data.pdf>.

Thanks for any information you can provide.

Cindy

Sadly, only minimal adequacy standards (if any) are applied to panel members. This became evident when my USDA Agricultural Research Service supervisor (Alberto Pantoja) was welcomed to serve on the (promotion) panels year after year, despite having discrimination complaints lodged against him by every woman research scientist in his unit.

Does it seem ethical for the ARS to embrace a biased promotion system (rather than one that relies on objective, measurable evaluation criteria)?

Does it seem ethical for the ARS to staff its promotion panel (year after year) without any regard for the ethical standing of its panel members or the number of ethics complaints filed against them?

Yes, but the data is not broken out by gender and GS-level, (thereby obscuring the disparate treatment of women research scientists in the USDA Agricultural Research Service).

From: Bower, Cindy
Sent: Monday, July 21, 2008 10:45 AM
To: Cole, Merle
Subject: RE: RPES training

Merle,

Thanks for the additional information, but it raises another question:

You stated that "The function of RPES is to classify research positions using RGEG criteria". I consulted the OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide and was surprised to discover that it (apparently) does not apply to me.

I am already familiar with the ambiguous system of classifying scientists such that a supervisory code of 4 (NOT the "nonsupervisory" code of 8, found in Box #7 on Form AD 332) is defined by OPM as nonsupervisory. However, I found no ambiguity concerning the "one-grade interval" positions that scientists occupy. ["Two grade interval series progress by two grade increments from GS-05 to GS-11 and include professional and administrative occupations. From GS-11 through GS-15, these series follow a one grade interval pattern."]

According to the RGEG manual:

"The Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG) provides grading criteria for nonsupervisory professional research work in the engineering and biological, medical, agricultural, physical, mathematical, and social sciences occupational groups for General Schedule (GS) and other "white collar" pay plans. In the General Schedule position classification system established under chapter 51 of title 5, United States Code, the positions addressed would be two-grade interval positions."

Since I'm clearly part of the one grade interval, why am I being classified using RGEG criteria?

Cindy

From: Cole, Merle
Sent: Mon 7/21/2008 9:18 AM
To: Bower, Cindy
Cc: Pantoja, Alberto; Matteri, Robert; Jang, Eric
Subject: RE: RPES training

Your position is classified as Research Food Technologist in the GS-1382 series, which is a 2-grade interval series. All professional research positions are in 2-grade interval series--and at GS-11 and above, all are graded by the RGEG.

As stated in The Classifier's handbook, page 30: "Two grade interval series progress by two grade increments from GS-05 to GS-11 and include professional and administrative occupations. >>(From GS-11 through GS-15,<< these series follow a one grade interval pattern.)" [emphasis added] This is true for all 2-grade intervals occupations.

Merle T. Cole
Head, Research Position Evaluation Staff
ARS Human Resources Division
301-504-1563
