

NI_360_301_A - Subpart A - GS-457, Soil Conservation Qualification Determinations

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301.0 OPM Qualification Standards

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) qualification standard covers positions in the General Schedule that involve the performance of two-grade interval professional and scientific work. Applicants who meet the basic requirements described in the individual occupational requirements are fully qualified for the specified entry grade. Specifically, applicants who possess the positive education requirements and have no specialized experience are generally qualified at the GS-5 grade level. Applicants may qualify for higher-level entry positions based on superior academic achievement.

301.1 Qualifications Determination-Method A

A. The candidate must possess a degree (successful completion of a full 4-year course of study in an accredited college or university leading to a bachelor's or higher degree that included a major field of study or specific course requirements) from an accredited institution. The degree may be in the following disciplines: soil conservation or related agricultural or natural resource discipline such as agronomy, soil science, forestry, agricultural education, or agricultural engineering.

B. The study must have included 30 semester hours in a natural resource or agricultural field, including at least 12 semester hours in a combination of soils and crops or plant science. Of the 12 semester hours, a minimum of 3 semester hours must have been in soils and 3 semester hours in crops or plant science.

301.2 Qualifications Determination-Method B

A. The quality of the combination of education and experience must be sufficient to demonstrate that the applicant possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform work in the occupation, and is comparable to that normally acquired through the successful completion of a full 4-year course of study with a major in the appropriate field.

B. The combination of education and experience must include at least 30 semester hours in one or more of the disciplines as shown in Method A above, including at least 12 semester hours in a combination of soils and crops or plant science, plus appropriate experience or additional education; of the 12 semester hours, a minimum of 3 semester hours must have been in soils and 3 semester hours in crops or plant science.

Note: The candidate must possess the positive education requirement before the Human Resources Specialist may consider combining education and experience.

C. Combination of Education and Experience Example: Faye Green is a Conservation District Partner who is pursuing her Master's Degree in Natural Resource Management. She currently possesses a B.S. Degree in Agronomy. She has completed 27 semester hours towards the 36-semester hour requirement for the Masters' Degree. As a Conservation District Partner, Faye

performs soil and water conservation studies that are used by NRCS employees to implement conservation planning initiatives statewide. Faye has performed this job part-time (20 hours per week) for one year while attending school for her Master's Degree.

D. Faye is qualified for consideration at the GS-9 and below level:

Faye's B.S. Degree in Agronomy qualifies her under Method A; we will assume she possess the 30-12-3 requirement. Faye has completed 75 percent of the education requirement for consideration at the GS-9 and her experience as a part time District Partner is equivalent to six months of specialized experience at the GS-7 level. The six months of specialized experience constitutes 50 percent of the requirement for GS-9 consideration. Therefore, the combination of education and specialized experience exceeds 100 percent.

301.3 Method B-Upper Level Course Work Requirement

A. As part of the 30-12-3 requirement, all candidates must possess at least 12 semester hours of upper level courses in soil conservation or related agricultural or natural resource discipline such as agronomy, soil science, forestry, agricultural education, or agricultural engineering. Upper level courses are defined as junior and senior level course work.

B. This provision does not apply to candidates currently enrolled in a four-year college or university and have declared a major in soil conservation or related agricultural or natural resource discipline such as agronomy, soil science, forestry, agricultural education, or agricultural engineering.

C. Example (1): John Q. Public has a B.A. degree in Marketing. He desires to become a GS-457-5, his transcripts reflect the 30-12-3 requirements are met; inclusive in the 30 semesters hours are 15 semester hours of upper level courses in soil conservation or natural resources. John Q. Public is qualified at the GS-5 level.

D. Example (2): Jack Smith has only taken courses at the local community college; his transcripts reflect the 30-12-3 requirement. Jack Smith is not qualified and does not meet the positive education requirement. Jack's transcripts do not reflect the 12 semester hours of upper level course work. Jack's transcripts from the community college do not lead to a four-year degree.

301.4 Qualifications Determination

A. Human Resource Specialists must exercise due diligence in reaching a positive qualification determination under Method B. The application of Method B infers that the candidate does not possess a degree or the candidate's degree does not meet the criteria described under Method A.

B. Human Resource Specialists will assess the qualification of candidates using the following steps:

(1) Determine whether the candidate's college or university transcripts are from an institution that would lead to successful completion of a full 4-year course of study that included a major field of study or specific course requirements. The candidate who only possesses a transcript from a junior or community college does not meet the intent of the qualification standards.

(2) Determine whether the candidate possesses at least 30 semester hours in one or more of the disciplines as shown in Method A above. The qualification analysis is concluded when the

candidate does not possess the requisite 30 semester hours.

(3) Determine whether the candidate possesses the 12 semester hours of upper level courses.

(4) Determine whether the candidate possesses 12 semester hours in a combination of soils and crops or plant science, plus appropriate experience or additional education; of the 12 semester hours, minimum of 3 semester hours must have been in soils and 3 semester hours in crops or plant science. The candidate who does not meet the criteria lacks the positive education requirement and is ineligible for further consideration.

C. Assessing Specialized Experience – The Human Resources Specialist should thoroughly review the qualification standards, position description, specialized experience statement and crediting plan before assessing the candidate's specialized experience. The Human Resources Specialist should conservatively evaluate specialized experience for positions in the GS-0457 series. Creditable specialized experience must have been equivalent to at least the next lower grade level in the normal line of progression for the occupation.

D. The assessment of specialized experience for non-Government employees, such as farmers, farm worker and partners should be closely scrutinized against the qualification standards, position description, specialized experience statement and crediting plan. The candidate who only states he/she has worked on a farm for a number of years has not illustrated that he/she possesses the specialized experience required to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position.

E. Soil Conservation Technician work may not be used as specialized experience for GS-0457 position above the GS-7 grade level. The Soil Conservation Technician is not a professional series and does not require positive education.

301.5 Qualification Determination-1987 Provision

Qualification requirements for GS-457 positions prior to February 1, 1987, required applicants to possess 3 semester hours or equivalent in soils. Applicants were not required to possess the crop or plant semester hour requirements. This provision only applies to employees who occupied GS-457 positions on or before February 1, 1987, and have continuously occupied a GS-457 position.

301.6 Details

A. The Human Resources Specialist will review the university transcript of all employees detailed to GS-0457 positions without regard to the employee's current position of record. The positive education determination must be completed prior to the effective date of the detail. The Human Resources Specialist will document on the request for personnel action that a positive education review was conducted and the date of the review.

B. The employee may present unofficial transcripts for the positive education review.

301.7 College Transcripts

A. Human Resource Specialists may not assume that a candidate meets positive education requirements simply because the candidate currently occupies a position in the GS-400 occupational family series or the candidate previously held a position in the GS-400 occupational family.

B. All candidates applying for positions in the GS-457 occupational series are required to submit transcripts with their application. Candidates may submit unofficial transcripts with their application. Candidates selected for appointment are required to submit official transcripts before entrance on duty or conversion to a new appointment. The official transcript must be presented to the Human Resources Office in a sealed envelope and must contain the school's official seal. Candidates selected for employment or conversion to a new appointment may personally deliver the sealed envelope or direct the university or college to mail the official transcripts to the Human Resources Office. College transcripts may be destroyed or returned to the employee after scanning into e-OPF.

301.8 Notification Period

A. If your vacancy announcement states that a college transcript (copy or original) must be submitted with their application, the applicant or current employee who does not provide the requested information by the closing date of the announcement will be rated ineligible for failure to supply required documentation.

B. The applicant or current employee bears the responsibility to provide the requested information within a timely manner. The minimum allotted time for an applicant or current employee to provide the original is three (3) business days after the initial day of notification of selection. The selecting official may extend the allotted time at his/her discretion.

301.9 Course Work-Non-Accredited Institutions

A. Human Resource Specialists may consider course work from non-accredited institutions when evaluating specialized experience. When evaluating positive education requirements, course work officially from non-accredited institutions shall not be considered. The Human Resources Specialist will award credit when the applicant has the course work evaluated by an accredited university or college.

B. Example: Employee participates in NEDC course. The course work is evaluated by an accredited university or college and assessed 3 semesters in conservation. The 3 semester hours may be credited towards meeting positive education. The employee must provide documentation from the university or college.

301.10 Creditable Natural Resources Degrees

A. Creditable four-year bachelor degrees include, but are not limited to soil science, soil conservation, or related agricultural or natural resource discipline such as agronomy, forestry, agricultural education, agricultural engineering, and plant and environmental soil science.

B. The Human Resource Specialist should review the college or university's academic programs to assess whether the candidate's degree is acceptable towards meeting the basic requirements. The Human Resources Specialist will document the merit promotion or delegated examining unit case file for any selected candidate who possess a degree that may be perceived as outside the norm.

301.11 Thirty (30) Semester Hour Requirement-Creditable Courses

A. The Human Resource Specialist may apply courses from the academic programs listed below. The list below is not all-inclusive. The Human Resource Specialist may require the candidate to present a course syllabus to verify that the course is appropriate for crediting towards the 30

semester hour requirement.

GS-457 Series Creditable Courses

Agricultural Chemistry	Chemistry	Land Evaluation
Agriculture Business	Civil Engineering	Parks and Recreation
Agriculture Economics	Dairy Science	Plant Breeding
Agriculture Education	Dendrology	Plant and Environmental
Agriculture Engineering	Earth Science	Soil Science Plant
Agriculture Law	Ecology	Pathology
Agriculture Policy	Entomology	Plant Physiology
Agricultural Science	Environmental Science	Plant Protection
Agronomy	Farm and Ranch	Plant Sciences
Animal Science	Appraisal	Poultry Science
Animal Breeding and	Farm and Ranch	Rangeland Ecology and
Genetics	Management	Management
Animal Husbandry	Farm Machinery	Renewable Natural
Animal Nutrition	Farm Organization and	Resources
Biochemistry	Management	Soil Microbiology
Bioenvironmental	Floriculture	Soil Science
Sciences Biology	Forestry	Spatial Sciences
Biophysics	Geology	Surveying
Botany	Geo Physics	Turf Management
	Genetics	Wildlife
	Horticulture	Zoology
	Hydrology	
	Land Appraisal	
	Land Economics	

B. The Human Resources Specialist may be required to read the course syllabus to determine whether the course work is related to natural resources conservation and appropriate for crediting towards meeting positive education requirements.