



**File Code:** 6100  
**Route To:** (5100)

**Date:** May 31, 2007

**Subject:** Change in Crediting Certain Coursework for Meeting the Positive Education Requirements for GS-401 Fire Management Specialist Positions

**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director and Deputy Chiefs

**REPLY DUE JUNE 29, 2007**

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has made some very significant changes to the Operating Manual for Qualifications Standards for General Schedule Positions. Specifically, Part E-4 (a) of the General Policies and Instructions were revised to address the “Acceptability of Higher Education for Meeting Minimum Qualification Requirements.” (See Enclosure 1 – OPM letter dated August 2, 2006). The OPM letter primarily addressed diploma mills and the use of bogus degrees to meet positive education requirement and as qualifying in-lieu of experience. While these changes apply to all positions, they have had a significant impact on positions covered by the Supplemental Standard for Fire Management positions in the GS-401 Fire Management series. The purpose of this letter is to transmit these changes to you and to explain the impact to employees who may apply for GS-401 positions or who are currently in a GS-401 position. Also, this letter will clarify your responsibilities in complying with this human resource technical requirement.

When the supplemental standard for Fire Management Specialists was approved on July 29, 2002, USDA and DOI worked jointly to create the interpretative guidance used for implementation. The guidance, which consists of three (3) attachments, has been used to qualify applicants and employees for Fire Management Specialist positions in the GS-401 series. Based on this new direction from OPM, we can only use Part A of Attachment 1 to the supplemental standard for Fire Management Specialists. We cannot use Attachments 2 and 3 at all. **You may only credit educational coursework that is listed on an official transcript from an accredited college or university.** This eliminates the use of all of National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWGC) course work, and the Technical Fire Management (TFM) coursework not listed on an official transcript, as previously described.

Employees who met qualification requirements prior to February 15, 2005 are okay. However, employees who met qualification requirements after February 15, 2005 and used coursework not listed on an official transcript, are the ones we are concerned with. This direction is effective immediately. We are pursuing this matter further with OPM in hopes that they will allow us to use NWGC and TFM coursework as we did prior to these new rules. However, in the meantime, we must comply and not put any more of our employees in jeopardy.

While we pursue options with OPM, several steps must be taken to comply with these new requirements, as follows:



1. Review all promotions, placements, and conversions of any applicant or employee placed in a GS-401 Fire Management position using NWGC, TFM or any other coursework not listed on an official transcript from an accredited college or university **since February 15, 2005. This means that you must review all relevant Merit Promotion and Demonstration Project Case files since that date.**
  - a. If the employee/selectee met Part A of the qualifications standard and the coursework meets the new requirement; no further action is necessary.
  - b. If the employee/selectee met qualification requirements using Part B of the qualifications standard, and they meet the new educational requirement; no further action is required.
  - c. If the employee/selectee met qualification requirements using Part B of the qualifications standard, and they **do not meet the new educational requirement** for the GS-401 series please work with your servicing HR staff to perform a complete qualifications analysis. Please complete this analysis and notify this office **by June 29, 2007**, with the information shown on Enclosure 2. Negative responses are also required. **At this time, do not downgrade or remove any employees from their positions until further notification from this office.**
2. Do not promote, convert, reassign or place any employees or candidates into GS-401 Fire Management positions unless they meet these new requirements.
3. For any current vacancy announcements and Referral Lists that do not comply with these new requirements, please redo Referral Lists to remove the names of employees who will no longer meet qualifications under the new direction. Enclosure 3 is a letter to send to applicants who were removed from referral lists due to revised qualifications standards. Since the original announcement would not have discouraged any group from applying, we do not need to reannounce unless the remaining candidate pool does not have applicants who can perform the work of the position without undue interruption of services.

I know that these changes may place some of our employees in a questionable position due to no fault of their own. Keep in mind that these changes were not made with the Forest Service or any of our other land management partners in mind. As previously stated, the intent was to address what had become an ever-increasing problem in the Federal sector with the use of bogus degrees and inappropriate educational coursework.

Should you have questions about this letter, please feel free to contact Gloria Banks at [gbanks@fs.fed.us](mailto:gbanks@fs.fed.us) or Lisa Gibson at [lisagibson@fs.fed.us](mailto:lisagibson@fs.fed.us) of the Washington Office Human Capital Management Staff.

*/s/ Hank Kashdan*

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