

MEMORANDUM

State of Alaska
Department of Administration
Division of Personnel & Labor Relations

To: Dianne Kiesel
Director

Date: January 22, 2007

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Subject: H&SS Specialized Support Study

Preamble:

In August, 2005, the Department of Health and Social Services requested a study of their Administrative Clerk positions performing specialized functions. The positions include Vital Statistics clerks, Public Assistance front desk clerks, Alaska Psychiatric Institute ward clerks, Public Health Nursing front desk clerks, and Alcohol Safety Action Program front desk clerks.

During the study planning meeting the following study goals/objectives were identified:

- Identify the unique characteristics of this body of work that are beyond the scope of the current classes utilized;
- develop detailed/accurate class specifications that recognize existing levels of complexity within the work and allow for a career ladder;
- develop minimum qualifications which emphasize customer service, judgment and computer skills; and
- determine appropriate salary ranges for the levels within the series.

Study Scope:

The study examined 178 positions within the Divisions of Public Assistance, Public Health, and Behavioral Health in the Department of Health and Social Services. The job classes included Administrative Clerk II-III, Administrative Supervisor, Secretary, Administrative Assistant, and Accounting Clerk II. Clerical positions in other Divisions or Departments were not submitted for review.

Study Method:

Following receipt of the study request and planning meeting H&SS submitted Position Descriptions for the positions to be studied. Agency contacts identified representative benchmark positions. Incumbent interviews were conducted for roughly 25% of the positions. After the

interviews the study was suspended due to other priority projects. In September, 2006, the study was reassigned, the materials re-examined, and the work analyzed for grouping into job classes.

History of Job Classes:

Administrative Clerk I-III and Administrative Supervisor were established in 1994. The job classes combined several clerical support classes into a single series written to cover a broad spectrum of duties and responsibilities.

Class Analysis:

The positions submitted for review perform a variety of clerical support duties in support of office and program operations. The principle duties are retrieving information for staff, clients, customers, and the general public; providing information on programs and available services; explaining program requirements, statutes, and regulations; reviewing materials submitted to determine if program requirements are met; determining and explaining how requirements may be met when materials are not complete or sufficient; maintaining information in various databases and filing systems; and identifying issues or problems which should be referred to other staff.

Some of the positions serve as supervisors or lead workers for other clerical staff with responsibility for training, organizing work, and resolving problems. Some positions serve as mentors or coaches without formal supervisory or lead responsibilities.

The distinguishing feature that led to the study request is the work performed as an agency's primary contact with clients, customers, and the general public. The character of this work is influenced by the nature of the agency's programs, the type of clients served, the potential for conflict or controversy, confidentiality requirements, and the independence with which employees are expected to perform their duties.

In the State's classification plan job classes are constructed as broadly as is feasible as long as the tests of similarity are met. The plan provides for grouping positions into job classes when they are sufficiently similar with respect to duties and responsibilities, degree of supervision exercised and received, and entrance requirements so that:

- 1) the same title can be used to clearly identify each position;
- 2) the same minimum qualifications for initial appointment can be established for all positions;
- 3) the same rate of basic pay can be fairly applied to all positions; and
- 4) employees in a particular class are considered an appropriate group for purposes of layoff and recall.

To identify if separate job classes for the H&SS positions were warranted we conducted two examinations. First, we compared the duties and responsibilities with class specifications to determine if the work was included in existing job classes. Then we compared the work with clerical positions in other departments and divisions to determine if the customer service role was sufficiently distinct to require treating the positions separately for purposes of personnel administration.

Examination of the class specifications for the Administrative Clerk series found duties as an office's initial point of contact and information source throughout the general clerical series. At the basic level the role is that of a receptionist; ascertaining what a caller or visitor needs; providing basic information on the services available; referring the individual to the proper person to meet specific needs; and examining documents, forms, applications, etc., for completeness or correctness within specific guidelines.

At the journey clerical level a front desk employee presents rules and procedures, such as telling a client how to apply, who to contact, schedules, deadlines, and other factual information; reads documents and correspondence to determine the adequacy of the content; makes contacts to obtain, clarify, or verify information; determines acceptability, adequacy, and completeness of information; and evaluates information against established standards. The work is straightforward following a specific course of action and the employee is not involved in interpretation and modification of procedures.

At the advanced clerical level a front desk employee's work requires specialized knowledge of a function or program to interpret specific circumstances and explain the application of rules and regulations. The employee answers questions and evaluates information that must be assessed or rated against standards or guidelines. Determining what action to take regularly involves deviating from established procedures or determining how to handle a situation for which there is no established procedure.

Comparing the positions in the study with the class specifications revealed sufficient similarity in duties and responsibilities, supervision received and exercised, and required knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet all of the tests for grouping positions into job classes. Further comparison of the nature of the programs, the type of clients served, the potential for conflict, and required confidentiality and independence with Administrative Clerk and Administrative Supervisor positions in other departments (such as Corrections and Labor and Workforce Development) and other divisions in H&SS (such as Alaska Pioneers' Homes, the Division of Juvenile Justice, and the Office of Children's Services) revealed substantive similarity in the nature of interactions with the public, clients, and staff and in the impact of technological changes. These similarities, and the policy of constructing job classes broadly, indicated creating new classes for the personnel administration of the positions in the Divisions of Public Assistance, Public Health, and Behavioral Health is not appropriate.

Conclusions:

The positions in the study are sufficiently similar to the characteristics of existing clerical job classes, and other positions allocated to those classes that were not included in the study, to meet the tests of similarity for constructing job classes. Establishing new job classes to guide the personnel administration of the study positions is not appropriate.

There have been changes to the work performed by employees in the clerical job classes due to changes in technology, the changing roles of government, and budgetary impacts on staffing levels. These changes are not reflected in the existing job classes and can lead to misapplication of the class specifications. The effects of the changes can be found in most of the agencies in the executive branch. We recommend a classification study be conducted covering all clerical

positions in the classification plan to ensure the class specifications reflect the work as it is currently performed, parity between agencies is maintained, and required qualifications validly reflect the needs of the positions.

The position descriptions submitted for this study have been returned to the agency without action.

cc: Janet Clarke, Assistant Commissioner
Department of Health and Social Services

Study Contacts