BEFORE THE PERSONNEL RESOURCES BOARD

STATE OF WASHINGTON

CHRISTEL RATLIFF, Appellant, vs. WASHINGTON STATE ARTS COMMISSION, Respondent.	CASE NO. R-ALLO-13-013 ORDER OF THE BOARD FOLLOWING HEARING ON EXCEPTIONS TO THE DETERMINATION OF THE DIRECTOR

Hearing on Exceptions. This appeal came before the Personnel Resources Board, NANCY HOLLAND YOUNG, Chair, DJ MARK, Vice Chair, and SUSAN MILLER, Member, for a hearing on Appellant's exceptions to the director's determination dated November 20, 2013. The hearing was held at the office of the Personnel Resources Board in Olympia, Washington, on May 14, 2014.

Appearances. Appellant Christel Ratliff was present and represented by Susanna Fenner, Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE). Respondent Washington State Arts Commission (ARTS) was represented by Jose Vidales, Department of Enterprise Services (DES) Human Resources Office, Maureen Clingman, DES Human Resources Office, and Lou MacMillan, Deputy Director for ARTS.

Background. In January 2013, Appellant completed a Position Review Request (PRR) asking that her Administrative Assistant 4 (AA4) position be reallocated to the Program Specialist 3 (PS3) classification. On April 9, 2013, DES's Human Resources Office, denied Appellant's request to be allocated to the PS3 classification and determined that her position should be reallocated to the Administrative Assistant 3 (AA3) classification. On April 24, 2013, the State Human Resources Division received Appellant's request for a Director's review of ART's allocation determination. By letter dated November 20, 2013, the director's designee determined that Appellant's position was properly allocated to the AA3 classification.

On December 18, 2013, Appellant filed exceptions to the director's determination. Appellant's exceptions are the subject of this proceeding.

ARTS offers grants to organizations and statewide partners, for K-12 arts in education and for special programs. The grant programs are the main body of the agency's mission. Appellant performs varied, high level administrative duties of a substantive nature and technical support for both The Arts in Education (AIE) and Grants to Organizations (GO) programs, using the Online Grant System and the Access database. The GO and AIE programs are the agency's two largest grant programs. The Online Grant System is a product of the Western States Art Federation (WESTAF). She is the primary contact and liaison for the WESTAF system programmers, which is used to track information for grants. Appellant's first line supervisor is Lou MacMillan, Deputy Director for ARTS. She also reports to and supports two Program Managers who have the overall authority and responsibility for the oversight of the GO and AIE grant programs. She also works closely with the ARTS Communications Manager.

Appellant is recognized as the agency's system expert for the Online Grants System and three Access databases which are used to manage grants. The tasks that appellant provides are to assist, collaborate and coordinate with grant managers in support of the grant making process; to maintain and update reports, creating queries, contract documents and payment tracking spreadsheets. She fields applicant questions on accessing and navigating the systems, setting up grant panels, monitoring online applications, documenting new processes and updating existing procedures in collaboration with grant managers. In addition, Appellant's duties include maintaining the agency's three Access databases. In performing her duties, Appellant facilitates and supports the administration of the grants.

Summary of Appellant's Arguments. Appellant argues she is responsible for administering and managing all components of the Online Grants system and is the subject matter expert for the GO and AIE programs within ARTS. Appellant describes the online system as complex and challenging

due to all the different components within the system. She asserts that working on the system comprises a majority of her time. Appellant asserts she is the expert and knows the system from both the user's and the administrator's sides. Appellant also contends that she is responsible for three Access databases used to track information for grants. She describes the online system as complex and requiring constant rethinking to develop queries and organize data. She explains that she is primary contact person and liaison for communicating issues and concerns on behalf of ARTS to WESTAF programmers, ARTS staff including two WMS program managers, her supervisor and the Executive Director. Appellant contends that she creates all of the reports that come out of the WESTAF system. Appellant argues that she troubleshoots and answers technical questions about the online systems and that she gives feedback and application assistance to applicants. She further argues that implementing the system required rewriting various guidelines, developing the online application form and training ARTS staff, panel members and applicants in the use of the system. She also fields applicant questions on how to access and navigate the system. Appellant asserts that she performs specialized work distinguishable from other programs in the organization. Appellant acknowledges that it is difficult to find the best fit for her job duties. However, Appellant argues that she has sole responsibilities to coordinate, manage, and administer each component of the Online Grant System. Appellant further argues that her position fits within the Program Specialist 3 classification or at the very least, the Administrative Assistant 4 classification.

Summary of Respondent's Arguments. ARTS contends that Appellant's assigned duties and responsibilities do not meet the Definition of a Program Specialist 3. ARTS describes Appellant as the resident expert in the Online Grants System, Appellant's duties are not in a designated discrete program that is separate and distinguished from the main body of work of the agency. Program Managers have full authority and responsibility of their assigned grants programs and that Appellant's position supports the administration of the grants. Appellant does not manage the programs; rather, she provides high level administrative support and troubleshooting duties for the Online Grants System.

ARTS acknowledges that Appellants is a highly valued employee, her knowledge, expertise and professionalism in performing her duties are highly valued by the agency. ARTS further explain's that WESTAF, runs the Online Grants System which is not a program but is a tool used to manage the grants and accomplish the core work of the agency.

ARTS asserts that on a best fit basis, the Administrative Assistant 3 classification best describes the variety of Appellant's duties and her level of responsibility and authority.

Primary Issue. Whether the director's determination that Appellant's position is properly allocated to the Administrative Assistant 3 classification should be affirmed.

Relevant Classifications. Administrative Assistant 3, class code 105G; Administrative Assistant 4, class code 105H; Program Specialist 3, class code 107J.

Decision of the Board. The purpose of a position review is to determine which classification best describes the overall duties and responsibilities of a position. A position review is neither a measurement of the volume of work performed, nor an evaluation of the expertise with which that work is performed. A position review is a comparison of the duties and responsibilities of a particular position to the available classification specifications. This review results in a determination of the class that best describes the overall duties and responsibilities of the position. See Liddle-Stamper v. Washington State University, PAB Case No. 3722-A2 (1994).

The following standards, in descending order, are the primary considerations in allocating positions:

- Class series concept (if one exists).
- Definition or basic function of the class.
- Distinguishing characteristics of a class.
- Class series concept, definition/basic function, and distinguishing characteristics of other classes in the series in question.

The class series concept for the Program Specialist classes states, in part:

> Positions in this series coordinate discrete, specialized programs consisting of specific components and tasks that are unique to a particular subject and are separate and distinguished from the main body of an organization. Positions coordinate program services and resources; act as a program liaison and provide consultation to program participants and outside entities regarding functions of the program; interpret, review and apply program specific policies, procedures and regulations; assess program needs; and develop courses of action to carry out program activities. Program coordination also requires performance of tasks and application of knowledge unique to the program and not transferable or applicable to other areas of the organization.
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> . . . .

Appellant's duties and responsibilities are an integral part of the Online Grants System. However, her position does not coordinate a discrete, specialized program, separate and distinguished from the main body of the organization. Rather, Appellant provides varied, high-level administrative support duties for program activities for the Online Grants System. Position allocations are not based on an evaluation of the performance or an individual's ability to perform higher-level work. Rather, it is based on the majority of work assigned to a position and how that work best aligns with the available job class. Appellant's position does not meet the intent of the Program Specialist Class Series Concept.

The definition of the Program Specialist 3 classification states, in relevant part:

> Positions at this level work under general direction and typically have organization-wide program responsibility. For programs with statewide impact, incumbents are specialists who manage one component or assist higher levels in two or more components of the program. . . .

Appellant's position does not have organization-wide program responsibility and her program does not have statewide impact. Appellant's position does not fit within the definition of the Program Specialist 3 class.

The Administrative Assistant class series does not contain a class series concept. Therefore, the first allocating criterion is the class definition.

The definition of the AA4 classification states:

> Positions serve as the assistant on administrative matters to the head of a state agency, the head of a major sub-division or major operating location of an agency, or to the chief administrator or head of a major organizational unit such as a school, college, or major academic/administrative department.

Appellant's position does not fit the definition. Appellant does not provide support to the head of a state agency, or the head of a major sub-division. Appellant's first line supervisor is the Deputy Director ARTS and she also reports and provides support and assistance to two Program Managers who are responsible for all aspects of the AIE program and the GO program. Because Appellant position does not meet the definition of the AA4 class, the AA4 classification is not the best fit for the Appellant.

The definition of the AA3 classification provides, "[p]ositions perform varied administrative and secretarial support duties or positions are responsible for one or more major program activities under a second line supervisor."

The distinguishing characteristics of the AA3 classification state:

> Positions are delegated higher-level administrative support duties or positions are delegated one or more major program activities that would be performed under a second-level professional supervisor, manager or administrator in WMS Band II or above or in exempt service, chief administrator, or head of a major organizational unit such as a school, college, or major academic or administrative department. Only one position will be allocated to an individual second-line supervisor for those positions performing one or more major program activities.
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> A major program activity is defined as a function that is a major element of the supervisor's job. The duty must stand alone and would create significant adverse consequences if poorly performed. However, full delegation can't occur if the supervisor's position requires specialized licensure such as attorneys, medical

> doctors, and engineers. Higher-level administrative duties are duties of a substantive nature that are appropriate to be performed by the supervisor, manager, administrator, or professional level employee but have been delegated to the administrative assistant to perform. Areas may include but are not limited to, the following: budget development and/or management, expenditure control, office space management, equipment purchases, budget development and/or management, public relations, personnel administration, records management, and report preparation.
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> Incumbents in these positions represent the supervisor's and/or unit's goals and interests and provide interpretation or explanation of the supervisor's policies or viewpoints.

On a best fit basis, Appellant's position fits within both the definition and distinguishing characteristics of the AA3 classification. Appellant performs a variety of high-level administrative duties of a substantive nature and is responsible for the Online Grants System in support of two programs. In addition, Appellant is the liaison and primary contact for the programs and as such, she represents the programs to vendors, consultants, applicants, grantees and staff. It is clear that Appellant is highly competent and performs her duties with professionalism and proficiency. However, position allocations are not based on an incumbent's competence; rather position allocations are based on the duties and responsibilities assigned to the position and how that work best aligns with the available job classes. In this case, the duties and responsibilities assigned to Appellant's position best fit within the Administrative Assistant 3 classification.

Most positions within the civil service system occasionally perform duties that appear in more than one classification. However, when determining the appropriate classification for a specific position, the duties and responsibilities of that position must be considered in their entirety and the position must be allocated to the classification that provides the best fit overall for the majority of the position's duties and responsibilities. See Dudley v. Dept. of Labor and Industries, PRB Case No. R-ALLO-07-007 (2007).

In this case, the Board is bound by the existing classification system and the primary considerations made in allocating a position. The Board must also consider the Appellant's own

description of her duties and her testimony at hearing. The Board finds that the Appellant's level and breadth of duties and responsibilities, and the reporting relationships of the position with ARTS best fit with the Administrative Assistant 3 (AA3) classification.

In a hearing on exceptions, the appellant has the burden of proof. WAC 357-52-110. Appellant has failed to meet her burden of proof.

ORDER

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the appeal on exceptions by Christel Ratliff is denied and the director's determination dated November 20, 2013, is affirmed.

DATED this _____ day of _____, 2014.

WASHINGTON PERSONNEL RESOURCES BOARD

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NANCY HOLLAND YOUNG, Chair

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DJ MARK, Vice Chair

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SUSAN MILLER, Member