

Optimum VA



The Official Newsletter of the
National Association of Veterans Affairs Optometrists

Spring 2008

NAVAO Officers

President

Gay Tokamaru

Vice President

Brian Kawasaki

Secretary

David Storer

Treasurer

Weon Jun

Welcome New VA Optometrists!

Nancy Shenouda-Awad
VA CT Healthcare System
950 Campbell Ave.
West Haven CT 06516
203 932 5711 x 2760
Nancy.Shenouda-Awad@va.gov

Donald Bockin
Central Texas VHCS
1901 S 1st.
Temple TX 76504
Donald.Bockin@va.gov

Michael Somogyi
VA Southern Oregon
8495 Crater Lake Hwy
White City, OR 97503
541 826 2111x 3822
Michael.Somogyi@va.gov

Jennifer D. Wood
Central Texas VHCS
1901 S. 1st
Temple TX 76504
Jennifer.Wood@va.gov

Susan H. Payne
Tampa VAMC
1300 Bruce B Downs Blvd
Tampa FL 33612
813 972 2000x 7513
Susan.Payne1@va.gov

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

[Welcome New VA
Optometrists](#)

[Armed Forces
Optometric Society](#)

[How to Advance Yourself
Within the VA system](#)

[Web Links](#)

Rebecca Bader
Spokane VAMC
4815 North Assembly
Spokane, WA 99205
509 434 7000
Rebecca.Bader@va.gov

Richard T Wacker
Central Texas VHCS
4800 Memorial Dr.
Waco TX 76704
254 297 3755
Richard.Wacker@va.gov

Marc D. Myers
Coatesville VAMC.
1400 Blackhorse Hill Rd.
Coatesville , PA 19320
Marc.Myers@va.gov

Frankie Goolsby
Tennessee Valley HCS
Nashville TN 37212
1310 25th Ave. South
615 327 4751
Frankie.Goolsby@va.gov

Bethany Jean Whitesell
Fayetteville VAMC
1100 N. College Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72703
417 466 1295
Bethany.Whitesell@va.gov

Katie Martindale
VA NYHHCS
423 East 23rd . St.
Brooklyn, NY 11209
212 686 7500
Katie.Martindale@va.gov

Matthew Anderson
Lake City VAMC
619 South Marion Ave.
Lake City , FL 32025
386 755 3016
Matthew.Anderson1@va.gov

Jerome Radliff
Richmond VAMC.
1201 Broad Rock Blvd.
Richmond, VA 23249
804 675 5000
Jerome.Radliff@va.gov

James Engstrom
FargoVAMC
2101 Elm St.
Fargo, ND 58102
701 239 3700x3896
James.Enstrom@va.gov

John Murphy
Biloxi VAMC,
400 Veterans Ave.
Biloxi, MS 39531
228 523 4905
John.Murphy2@va.gov

Christopher Suhr
New Port Richey OPC
9912 Little Rd.
New Port Richey, FL 34654
727 869 4100x 4225
Christopher.Suhr1@va.gov

Luciana Coscione
VAMC Detroit-553
4646 John R St.
Detroit , MI 48201
313 576 1000x 65742
Luciana.Cocione@va.gov

Piper Groppe
Indianapolis VAMC,
1481 West 10th St.
Indianapolis, IN 46202
317 988 6109
Piper.Groppe@va.gov

John Volosin
Wichita VAMC.
5500 E. Kellogg
Wichita, KS 67218
316 685 2221
John.Volosin@va.gov

Rachel Caywood
Oklahoma City VAMC>
921 NE 13
Oklahoma City , OK 73104
405 2700501x 3909
Rachel.Caywood@va.gov

Julie Staats
Cincinnati VAMC,
3200 Vine St.
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513 861 3100
Julie.Staats@va.gov

Jennifer Crown
Walla Walla VAMC .
88 Wainwright Dr.
Walla Walla , WA 99362
Jennifer.Crown@va.gov

Bethany Martinez
Birmingham VAMC.
700 S. 19th. St.
Birmingham, AL 35233
205 933 8101 x 7935
Bethany.Martinez@va.gov

Kevin Mercado
Cincinnati VAMC.
3200 Vine St.
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513 861 3100
Kevin.Mercado@va.gov

How to Advance Yourself Within the VA System

VISN 6 Mentor: Angela Musick, OD

Email: angela.musick1@va.gov

Important References:

VA Optometry Website: <http://www1.va.gov/optometry>

Federal Pay Tables Website: <http://www.opm.gov/oca/07tables/>

Appendix G5. Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5 (April 15, 2002)

http://www1.va.gov/optometry/docs/HB5005_APPENDIX_G5_Section_B_-_Qualifications.doc

Employee Recognition and Awards: VA Directive 5017 (April 15, 2002)—(see especially Part V)

http://vaww.va.gov/hrdirectives/Dir_Hnbks/5017.doc (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website)

Optometry Professional Standards Board Checklist

http://www1.va.gov/optometry/docs/Optometry_Boards_Checklist.doc

Pay Administration: VA Handbook 5007/10 (February 6, 2004)

<http://www1.va.gov/Ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5007-10.PDF>

Appendix H4. Procedures for Appointing Optometrists: VA Handbook 5005/8, Part II Appendix H4 (June 22, 2004)

<http://www1.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5005-8.PDF>

Chapter 5. Advancements and Cash and Honor Awards: MP-5, Part II Chapter 5 (October 30, 1998)

http://vaww.va.gov/hrdirectives/Part_II/chap05.pdf (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website)

Chapter 5. Within Grade Increases and Periodic Step Increases: VA Handbook 5007/15, Part III Chapter 5 (November 26, 2004)

<http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Documents/5007PayAdminChng16.doc> (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website)

Special Attention to:

“How Does a VA Optometrist Get Promoted to a Higher Grade?” by Dr. Dwayne D. Young, St. Louis VAMC—Optimum VA article, October 1989

“My View of the Professional Standards Board (PSB)” by Dr. Robert Newcomb—Optimum VA article, April 1990

Table of Contents:

- 1) [General Synopsis of Terms and Pay Grades](#)
- 2) [Qualification Standards and Grade Requirements Overview](#)
- 3) [Grade Promotion Process](#)
- 4) [Step Promotion Process](#)
- 5) [Tips and Recommendations for Efficient and Successful Advancement](#) (**READ THIS...VERY IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW**)
- 6) [Example Promotion Request](#)
- 7) [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

General Synopsis of Terms and Pay Grades:

Federal pay scales are called pay *grades*, and one's grade determines one's salary range (follow the link to the [Federal Pay Table for 2007](#)). Optometrists may be placed in one of five grades (depending on the individual's qualifications):

- GS-11 (Associate Grade)
- GS-12 (Full Grade)
- GS-13 (Intermediate Grade)
- GS-14 (Senior Grade)
- GS-15 (Chief Grade)

Each pay grade is divided into 10 *steps*, for instance someone near the top of Full grade might be considered to hold the level of GS-12, step 9 (Full Grade, step 9), whereas someone in the first part of that same grade might be at the level of GS-12, step 2. There are time requirements (*Time-in-grade*) for each grade, meaning that an optometrist must remain in a given pay grade for the required amount of time before advancing to the next level.

Optometrists and other professionals within the Veterans Health Administration fall under *Title 38 of the United States Code*, where civil service employees fall under *Title 5 of the US Code*. Before October 21, 1976, Title 38 only included allopathic and osteopathic physicians and dentists, but the VHA Optometry Service (along with the Podiatry Service) was transferred into Chapter 73 of Title 38, United States Code by Public Law 94-581 with the establishment of the Director of Optometric Service position. Title 5 is a merit-based, or "Rank in Position" system in which one's position description determines one's pay grade, whereas Title 38 is a non-merit based, or "Rank in Person" system in which personal qualifications affect pay grade. Title 5 exists as a government-wide, civil service entity. Title 38 applies to Veterans Health Administration employees alone and was created by Congress after WWII so that the VA could promote clinicians based on professional qualifications, while their clinical duties (direct patient care) remained unchanged.

Grade increases for Title 38 personnel are determined by education, experience and personal performance, instead of job description or seniority. Such that an optometrist (or other professional) may achieve Chief pay grade without being the Chief of Optometry or Chief of the Section. Conversely, it is possible to hold the title of Chief of Optometry without achieving a Chief pay grade, for instance, one may be at the level of GS-13 (or Intermediate Grade) while still being Chief of the Optometry Section at a medical center.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Qualification Standards and Grade Requirements Overview:

Basic Requirements Overview:

- 1) US Citizenship (Noncitizens may only be appointed when recruitment of citizens is not possible)
- 2) Doctor of Optometry degree received from a school or college of optometry approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- 3) Unrestricted licensure in a State, Territory or Commonwealth of the United States or the District of Columbia.
- 4) Physical standards (See VA Directive and Handbook 5019)
- 5) English language proficiency.

Grade Requirements Overview:

- 1) **Associate Grade (GS-11):** Basic requirements only.
***** 2 years Time-in-grade is required at this level in order to advance to Full Grade.**
- 2) **Full Grade (GS-12):** Two years of optometric practice or its equivalent, along with demonstrated competence to provide the full range of clinical optometric diagnosis and treatment of ocular disease. (NOTE: One year of approved residency training is considered equivalent to two years of practice, as far as VA requirements are concerned.)
***** 2 years Time-in-grade is required at this level in order to advance to Intermediate Grade.**
- 3) **Intermediate Grade (GS-13):**
 - A) Four years of optometric practice or its equivalent.
 - B) Passage of the NBEO exam and EITHER of the following:
 - (1) Stature that would warrant appointment as a clinical instructor at a school or college of optometry.

- (2) Recognition by a recognized professional organization (such as a Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry)
- C) High level of professional achievement, illustrated by one or more of the following:
 - (1) Becoming a recognized expert in diagnosis and treatment (such as serving as a consultant or providing expert services in such areas as the partially sighted or contact lenses for aphakics.)
 - (2) Responsibility for a multi-faceted program including clinical, technological or instrumentation research.
 - (3) Taking significant part in the conduct of vision research; publishing valuable articles in the individual's field; serving on important committees within the profession.
 - (4) Full responsibility for carrying out an optometric training program of significant size, in which the optometrist is the liaison with an affiliated school, college or educational institution and professional or scientific organizations.

***** 3 years Time-in-grade is required at this level in order to advance to Senior Grade.**

- 4) **Senior Grade (GS-14):** Meets the requirements for Intermediate Grade as well as the following:
 - A) Academic stature that would warrant a faculty appointment of a professional level in an approved school or college of optometry.
 - B) Superior professional attainment as evidenced by one or more of the following:
 - (1) Served as a team leader in attacking major optometric problems affecting the continued provision of quality care health services at a VISN, statewide, or national level.
 - (2) Responsible for carrying out a major optometric program segment on a national level.
 - (3) Conducted high level studies in a difficult area of vision research, providing important professional publications.

***** 4 years Time-in-grade is required at this level in order to advance to Chief Grade.**

- 5) **Chief Grade (GS-15):** Meets the requirement for Senior Grade and demonstrates a sustained high level of performance in professional or administrative development by the following:
 - A) Assumed substantial professional or administrative responsibilities in which the individual is expected to fully advise and make professional clinical and educational recommendations as to courses of action on problems and considerations of national scope in all areas of optometry. (Typically responsible for a major optometric program segment on a nationwide basis and has been consistently called upon to represent the organization in an authoritative manner in matters dealing with new concepts.)
 - B) Outstanding professional attainment, such as:
 - (1) Outstanding results in research
 - (2) Significant number of noteworthy publications in professional journals.

NOTE: This listing is merely an overview of the qualification standards, and many of the requirements are vague and subject to interpretation. Any questions regarding the standards should be directed to the actual notice in the VA Handbook which may be reached through the [OD Qualification Standards Link](#).

[Table of Contents](#) [References](#)

Grade Promotion Process:

Once requirements are met for promotion, the process begins *several months before* the anniversary of the optometrist's last grade promotion or appointment (Anniversary Date of Grade or ADG). This will take planning and will need the approval of your immediate supervisor, among others. It is a good idea to discuss your plans with your supervisor ahead of time, to insure a smooth process.

If you have met the Time-in-grade requirements for advancement *as well as* the requirements for advancement listed within the [Qualification Standards](#), your supervisor will need to recommend your promotion to the next grade. Each site handles the request slightly differently; some may require a memo from the optometrist seeking advancement to be signed off by a supervisor (and others), while other sites may require that the recommendation and memo or formal request start at the supervisory level. Again, this is a good reason to discuss your plans with your supervisor, to see what the protocol is for your station.

Once your supervisor approves the request for promotion, the process will need concurrence by the Service Chief, Chief of Staff, and the Medical Center Director. From there, final approval comes from the Optometry Professional Standards Board (PSB) at the VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. Get to know who your Human Resources (HR) representative is ahead of time, since HR will also be involved in the process, and it generally proves efficient to give your HR representative a heads up on the process.

The Professional Standards Board is composed of four members at any given time. The Director of Surgical Service is the Chairman of the PSB, and the Director of Optometry Service is the Secretary, while the other two members are VA optometrists from the field. The PSB interprets the Qualification Standards and makes every effort to apply these in a fair and consistent manner.

There are several documents that will need to be provided to the PSB, many of which may be obtained from Human Resources, if you do not already have copies of the documentation saved in your own files. (It is also a good idea to keep copies of all your HR documentation in a file for easy access.) Your request will need copies of the forms and information on the [PSB Checklist](#):

- 1) Cover letter with request information

- 2) Human Resources Point of Contact
- 3) Employee's Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG)
- 4) Current Curriculum Vitae
- 5) Copy of the latest Standard Form 50-B: Notification of Personnel Action
- 6) Copies of the last 3 Proficiency Reports, including a current report (or what is available)
- 7) Copy of your Board Actions for the past 3 years (or what is available)
- 8) Recommendation from the rating official
- 9) Evidence of Completion of the National Boards (for Intermediate Grade and higher)
- 10) Evidence of meeting the requirements for the grade increase for which you are applying

As stated above, the idea is to plan ahead and get momentum rolling *before* your Anniversary Date of Grade, so that your promotion may coincide as closely as possible to this date. This is not a requirement for promotion, and you may, if you choose or if circumstances require, begin the process after your ADG. Once the requirements for promotion are met, you may submit for grade advancement whenever you and supervisor choose to do so, but remember that *waiting is time (and money) lost*. For instance, if your Anniversary Date of Grade is January 3rd, but you choose not to submit for promotion until April 1st, the process may take several months, and your promotion may not come through until, for example, August 18th. Now your ADG is changed to August 18th as far as your next promotion is concerned, and the 7½ months between your previous Anniversary and your current one are lost to a lower-than-necessary pay grade. That may not seem like a great deal of time, but over the years, it translates into a loss of earnings that could have been prevented by a little planning.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Step Promotion Process:

The process for step promotion is very similar to that for grade promotion requests (except in the first case presented below), in that these must go through your supervisor (though not necessarily through the entire local chain of command—this depends on the individual VISN and local requirements and traditions), and Human Resources plays a large part in the process. These types of promotions are also subject to the approval of the Optometry Professional Standards Board, and require the specific paperwork when presented to the Board:

- 1) Cover letter with request information
- 2) Human Resources Point of Contact
- 3) Employee's Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG)
- 4) Current Curriculum Vitae
- 5) Copy of the latest Standard Form 50-B: Notification of Personnel Action
- 6) Copies of the last 3 Proficiency Reports, including a current report (or what is available)
- 7) Copy of your Board Actions for the past 3 years (or what is available)
- 8) Recommendation from the rating official

There are three **main** types of step advancements or increases:

Periodic Step Increases, a.k.a. Within-Grade Increases (WIGI):

Per VA Handbook 5007/10 ([Pay Administration](#)), Chapter 5, Section 1.c.1 (dated February 6, 2004), periodic step increases are offered to any optometrist who is **not** at the maximum rate of his/her grade after a *waiting period* of 104 weeks (2 years). The step increase offered will be to the next higher step in the grade. In other words, as long as an optometrist is below step 10 within a pay grade, he or she will be offered a one-step increase in pay level every 2 years on the Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG). This is the one process that is generally handled by Human Resources, and does not require a request sent to the Professional Standards Board, though it is always a good idea to make sure the process is under way...remember that your career is your responsibility.

*** *NOTE: There is some confusion as to the exact waiting period for a Periodic Step Increase, and it was brought to my attention that some of us are under the impression that when a clinician is below step 3 in his or her grade, the waiting period for WIGI is only 52 weeks. This is not true for optometrists, physicians, dentists or podiatrists (though it is true for nurses and physician assistants).*

Please reference:

[Within Grade Increases and Periodic Step Increases: VA Handbook 5007/15, Part III Chapter.](#)

Special Advancement for Performance (SAP) Increases:

This type of increase must be requested or submitted to Human Resources by your supervisor, and then must be approved by the central Professional Standards Board. The request must be made to Human Resources at least 90 days prior to the scheduled 2-year periodic step increase, and once approved, the increased pay rate and step will take effect on the Anniversary Date of Grade.

According to MP-5, Part II, Chapter 5: [Advancements and Cash and Honor Awards](#), 5-17: Special Advancement for Performance, “An **advancement of three steps**, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted in lieu of and on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. ...The advancement shall be regarded as an equivalent increase. ...No two such advancements may be granted in succession within the grade.”

According to VA Handbook 5017, Part V: [Employee Recognition and Awards](#): Criteria for Special Advancement for Performance (SAP), “The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance as evidenced by the following examples:

- 1) Demonstration of exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.
- 2) Actual assumption of greater professional and/or administrative responsibility. Faculty appointment (post residency) at the rank of instructor or above may be considered as a greater responsibility.
- 3) Significant research.
- 4) Significant clinical contribution (including publication).”

In other words, if you are due for a periodic step increase, and you have demonstrated any or all of the above professional considerations, you should consider speaking with your supervisor and HR representative about increasing your normal periodic step increase from **one step to two or three steps (for a maximum increase of three steps)**, not to exceed the maximum of grade (step 10). It is interesting to note that “no two such advancements may be granted *in succession* within the grade” [emphasis added]. This does not state that a Special Advancement for Performance may only be achieved once in a grade, but that it may not be achieved more than once in succession within the grade...of course, if grade increases are requested properly, that will translate into only once per grade for most optometrists, but that will be discussed [later](#).

Special Advancement for Achievement (SAA) Increases:

This type of increase must also be requested or submitted to Human Resources by your supervisor, and then must be approved by the central Professional Standards Board. But the request may be made at any time, without regard to an Anniversary Date of Grade or waiting period (as in the previous two types of step rate changes).

According to MP-5, Part II, Chapter 5: [Advancements and Cash and Honor Awards](#), 5-14: Special Advancement for Achievement, “**optometrists** in Chief grade and below... who have achieved exceptional and recognized professional attainment may be considered for advancement within the grade. **The advancement may be from one to five steps....** The effective date of the special advancements for achievement is the 1st day of the pay period following administrative approval by the appropriate authority. ...Such an advancement shall not be regarded as an equivalent increase in compensation for pay purposes.”

According to VA Handbook 5017, Part V: [Employee Recognition and Awards](#): Criteria for Special Advancement for Achievement (SAA), “optometrists may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment.... Examples of professional achievement are:

- 1) Outstanding and exceptional achievement as evidenced by receipt of official recognition from a recognized professional or academic organization
- 2) Significant professional attainment in research or contributions to...optometric science and patient care worthy of publication in a national or international journal of high regard within the respective professions.”

In other words, this type of advancement is one for which an employee may apply at any time and as many times as necessary during one’s tenure in a given grade. The **maximum number** of steps that may be requested in the SAA process is **five steps**. (Note that this type of advancement **is not** regarded as an equivalent increase, which tends to be a rate-limiting increase, so to speak. Also note that a Special Advancement for Performance **is** considered an equivalent increase, which is why SAPs are not allowed more than once in succession within a grade.)

NOTE: According to a source in Human Resources, the rules for achieving an SAP are less stringent than the rules for achieving an SAA, but of course the SAP process is time sensitive.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Tips and Recommendations for Efficient and Successful Advancement:

The following recommendations are based on conversations with more tenured VA optometrists, the [articles](#) of Dwayne Young and Robert Newcomb cited in the references at the top of the document, and perusal of the official VA documents listed as references.

- 1) Start planning from day one!!! The successful optometrist will *ask questions* of senior optometrists and avoid the mistakes that most of us have made in the promotion process.

- 2) At this point in time, being elected into Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry (FAAO) and passing the Advanced Competence in Medical Optometry (ACMO) exam both warrant a 3-step increase when requested as a Special Advancement for Achievement (SAA) award. Good to know when you are at a step 6 within your grade.
- 3) Plan your advancements carefully and with diligence.

IMPORTANT note: you may often use an accomplishment to advance several steps through an SAA or SAP, then mention that same accomplishment when applying for a grade increase after your Time-in-grade is complete, but if you use an accomplishment to receive your next grade increase, you cannot then turn around and use that same accomplishment toward an SAA for a step increase within your new grade. For example:

Dr. I.C. Yu is at the level of GS-12, step 10 (Full Grade) and will be applying for advancement to GS-13 (Intermediate Grade) within a few months. She is currently serving as clinical faculty for a nearby optometry school, overseeing students and residents, and she has all-but-attained the level of Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry. Now we know that *either* of these highly regarded professional achievements will merit consideration for advancement to the Intermediate Grade level, but **both** are not required. Dr. Yu would do well to apply for advancement to the next grade based on her faculty position, which would advance her to the level of a GS-13, step 6. Then upon being elected as a Fellow in the Academy, she could request a Special Advancement for Achievement, warranting a 3-step increase and putting her at the GS-13, step 9 pay rate. In three years, after Dr. Yu has accomplished her Time-in-grade and other requirements to apply for another grade increase, she may again mention her Fellowship in the Academy to warrant promotion to Senior Grade. Well thought out, Dr. Yu!!

However, if Dr. Yu had chosen to use her Academy Fellowship to gain the promotion to Intermediate Grade (GS-13), she would forfeit her ability to use that achievement in a future SAA for a 3-step increase (to GS-13, step 9), thus depriving herself of well-deserved advancement. She would then need to find another way to advance within the grade...perhaps she would then publish an article, present a poster, lecture at a continuing education conference, or participate in professional organizations.

- 4) If you are wondering how we arrived at the Grade level/step rate prediction in the example above, consider this: When applying for a grade increase, it is best to be as near the top of your current pay grade as possible. When you advance a grade, you advance based on pay rate, and it works out to whatever step within the next grade that would be equivalent to the pay rate increase that you would receive if you were to advance 2 steps within your current grade. (Confusing? Take a look at the [Pay Table](#) and note that at GS-12, step 10 pays more than a GS-13, step 2.... This turns out to automatically place someone advancing from a step 10 in one grade to a step 6 in the next grade. A step 9 would most likely advance to a step 5 in the next grade, and so on, insuring that the advancement equals an increase in pay. But as in the military, it is *always* best to advance from a position of strength, so try to be at or near the top of your current pay grade when applying for a grade increase :)
- 5) Know your Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG). Mark it on your calendar, write it on your heart, and keep it in your files. This date is important for Grade Promotions as well as periodic step increases and Special Advancement for Performance (SAP) increases. You will want to advance to the next Grade at the earliest time possible, so as not to lose time and money to a lower-than-necessary pay grade, and you will want to request any SAPs around 90 days before your next periodic step increase takes effect. Don't let this date pass you by, or you will miss out on earnings, and there will be no back pay to recoup your losses.
- 6) Within any grade, your goal is to reach step 10 as soon as possible. You have to spend the required Time-in-grade regardless of where you are within the grade, so you may as well make the best of it, earning as much as you can for each year that you remain in the grade.
- 7) Know your Human Resources representative and keep in touch with your supervisor. You may be busy, but so is your supervisor, and you cannot expect her/him to remember your ADG and offer you the increases you deserve. It's best not to throw everything at this person at one time anyway. Let your supervisor know your accomplishments as you achieve them, make known your plans and goals, and give them a heads up before you submit for advancement.
- 8) Keep copies of everything... You passed the National Boards? Have a copy of your certification handy. Licensed in a state? Keep a copy in a readily-accessible file. Latest SF-50 forwarded to you by Human Resources after your last Personnel Action? Have a copy where you can get to it. Keep copies of your annual Proficiency Reports (you may need the last 3 or what is available) and Board Actions for the last 3years.... You get the idea. And it pays to keep your CV updated with each new accomplishment.

It never hurts to help your Human Resources rep by adding copies of the necessary paperwork to your promotions request, so that he or she will not need to take the extra time to do it. Not your job? Guess again...you want to make the process as easy as possible for everyone else involved so that it will have speedier results.
- 9) Be specific in your requests. Have you published quite a few papers that you think would warrant a 5-step increase for an SAA? Go ahead and request to your hearts desire. The Professional Standards Board may overrule you and only offer 3 steps, but wouldn't you hate to request (and receive) only one step, when you could have advanced three?
- 10) Remember that with Special Advancements for Performance, "no two such advancements may be granted in succession within the grade," while Special Advancements for Achievement may be requested any time the achievements warrant a recommendation to the Board.

11) ONE MORE VERY IMPORTANT PIECE OF INFORMATION: **Timing Is Of Great Importance Here.** If you put in for any type of advance, as far as the Professional Standards Board is concerned, it will not be considered part of your record until your Director signs it (after the board approves it) and it actually goes into effect. ***Any achievements made on your part during the interim (from the time you submit for the advancement or grade increase to the time it goes into effect) will be counted as if they were part of the advancement package already submitted.*** What does this mean? Let's say you put in for a grade increase in October, and you hope to get to step 6 within the next grade when the promotion goes through. Thinking that you will probably receive your promotion well before June, you sign up to take the ACMO in June of the very next year (after all, it is worth a 3 step increase, right?) While this seems like good planning...it's sounds efficient, and you hope to put in for a 3-step advancement about one year after requesting a grade increase. What could be better? Unfortunately, once you submit your advancement paperwork, the whole process is out of your hands. If the paperwork gets stopped somewhere along the trail (or lost!...these things do happen) and the process is delayed for several months, you could find that your Grade Increase Promotion is dated ***after*** the June date of the ACMO that you have planned to take in order to get you to the NEXT level. Now, even if you take the ACMO and pass it, you will find that your efforts are all for naught, because the date on the ACMO falls ***before*** the date of your most recent increase...which means that it will be counted as if it had already been submitted as part of your last package. You will not be able to use it for a 3-step advancement. Just remember to get your next achievements dated ***after*** your latest promotion or advancement ***effective date.***

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Example Promotion Request:

NOTE: All VAMCs or VISNs were not created equal when it comes to promotions requests. Some prefer a memo, while some prefer a letter. Some VAMCs send everything through the VA Director before it goes to HR (even with SAAs and SAPs), while others let HR and the Professional Standards Board handle everything first. In some cases your supervisor will keep an account of your progress and help you out, but in most cases you are on your own.

It will generally be up to you to see that the ball is in motion, and it will be up to you to see that the request is made (make sure you have met the time-in-grade and standards requirements first, then CHECK WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR regarding the local process).

Generally speaking, your best bet is to take care of as much of the process yourself as possible, which will speed things up...other people involved in the process *usually* appreciate having less to do (this is a very general statement, of course). The following is an example memo and a good place to start (you may want to use the VA Standard Forms memo).

Department of Memorandum Veterans Affairs

Date: Thursday, December 20, 2007
From: I. C. Yu, OD
Subject: Request Consideration for Special Advancement for Achievement - I. C. Yu, OD
To: Director, Anywhere VA Medical Center
Thru: Chief, Optometry Section (000a)
Chief, Surgical Care Service Line (000)

- 1) Request consideration for **Special Advancement for Achievement advancement of FOUR steps**. I have fulfilled the requirements set out in **VA Handbook 5017, Part V: Employee Recognition and Awards: Criteria for Special Advancement for Achievement (SAA)** that pertain to the primary goal of “*outstanding and exceptional achievement as evidenced by receipt of official recognition from a recognized professional or academic organization,*” as evidenced by the following:
1. In December of 1919, I became a consultant for the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE).
 2. I have been a member of the Continuing Education Committee for the Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) since the spring of 1917, serving in the following capacity:
 - a. July 1917 – February 1918: I assisted our Committee Chair in the planning and coordination of our society’s annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.
 - b. August 1918 – February 1919: In the absence of our committee Chair, I co-directed, planned, and executed the Continuing Education Program for the AFOS Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in February 1919.
 3. In April of 1918, I established a student externship program with the University of Guam—Eye Doctor School and am currently the liaison between the Anywhere VAMC Eye Clinic and UGEDS.
 4. In February of 1917, I was appointed as a *Part-time Faculty Instructor, Clinical Track, Discipline of Optometry* with the Anywhere College of Osteopathic Medicine in Anywhere, CA.
- 2) Thank you for your time and attention to consideration of advancing me four steps via a Special Advancement for Achievement.

I. C. Yu, OD

Circle: Concur Do Not Concur
Circle: Concur Do Not Concur

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Roland Stone, OD, FAAO

Chief, Optometry Section

Carter L. O’Pay, MD

Chief, Surgical Care Service Line

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Frequently Asked Questions:

- 1) Is it possible to advance to Chief Grade when you work in a CBOC?

Yes! You CAN get to GS14 and even GS15 from a CBOC, but it takes more planning.

2) How do the requirements for promotion to...say GS-14 Senior Grade translate into real world requirements?

Senior Grade (GS-14): Meets the requirements for Intermediate Grade as well as the following:

- a. Academic stature that would warrant a faculty appointment of a professional level in an approved school or college of optometry.
- b. Superior professional attainment as evidenced by one or more of the following:
 - i. Served as a team leader in attacking major optometric problems affecting the continued provision of quality care health services statewide, or national level.
 - ii. Responsible for carrying out a major optometric program segment on a national level.
 - iii. Conducted high level studies in a difficult area of vision research, providing important professional publications.

***** 4 years Time-in-grade is required at this level in order to advance to Chief Grade.**

My personal and unofficial advice, For Paragraph (b) section (ii):

- 1) Join the **Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS—<http://www.afos2020.org/>)** and the **American Optometric Association (AOA—<http://www.aoa.org/>)** and get involved. Offer to join committees, and come to meetings to get to know people. We often forget that AFOS is a national outlet.
- 2) Join the **National Association of VA Optometrists (NAVAO—<http://www.navao.org/>)** and get involved. Volunteer!
- 3) Join the Association of Military Surgeons—United States (AMSUS—<http://www.amsus.org/>) and get involved.
- 4) Consider becoming an examiner for the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO—<http://www.optometry.org/>).
- 5) Consider training to become a consultant for the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE—<http://www.aoa.org/x5153.xml>). *For this you MUST be a member of AOA, and you may need to have a recommendation from a Council member or another consultant. It also requires a bit more time and dedication in the training process and travel as a consultant.*

NOTE: Many of the above options take time and planning. You will not walk onto a Council or Board anywhere without getting involved and proving your worth first. These options will also take some of your free time, and some may require travel, especially numbers 4 and 5.

For Paragraph (b) section (i):

- 1) Get involved in local or VISN committees. No one truly loves meetings, but they look good on a national level, especially if you get involved enough to do presentations and such. Contact the Chief of Optometry or Chief of Surgery at the medical center (or even the Chief of Primary Care) to see if there are committees you can join.
- 2) If allowed, join your state organization (hopefully at a lower price, if you're a member of AFOS—we've been fighting for that in all the states), and try to get involved there.
- 3) Start writing articles and case reports. Once you've written several articles on a particular subject, you may be asked to lecture. This is good planning for Chief grade as well.... (You'll notice that a LOT of VA ODs lecture at Academy...this is why.)
- 4) Put together a good lecture and apply for COPE approval (visit the ARBO/COPE website for details: <http://www.arbo.org/>), then see if anyone bites...faster than waiting to be invited to lecture.

For Paragraph (b) section (iii):

- 1) Get at least semi-involved in VA research. Many VA optometrists are always looking for a research project in which to get involved...ask around!

Good Luck!

Armed Forces Optometric Society

by Janel Chou, O.D.
Hampton VAMC

My name is Aly Wasik and I am a staff optometrist at the Tucson VA Medical Center in Arizona. I also serve as the Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) membership committee chair and am the VA member at large on the executive council.

AFOS is the state affiliate of AOA that represents federal service optometry and is our voice in the AOA. If you are already a member, thank you for your support! If you have not yet joined, I encourage you to check out the **Why Join AFOS?** power point created by Janel Chou, OD, one of my committee assistants. We need to have a unified voice so we can continue to make progress in VA optometry and AFOS will help us in our efforts.




Why Join AFOS?

What is it?
What can it do for me?


What is AFOS?

- **Armed Forces Optometric Society**
- **Founded in 1970**
- **It is a state affiliate of the AOA that represents federal service optometry (VA, PHS, Navy, Army, Air Force)**



Mission

- Advance, improve, & enhance the eye care provided to designated federal services' health care beneficiaries by optometrists in federal service
- To provide a forum
- To improve the art & science of the practice of optometry
- To elevate the standards of the practice.



So Why Join?

- Advocacy & Lobbying: It's our voice in AOA
- Continuing Education
 - ▣ Provided @the annual conference @SECO & AAO meeting
- Licensure by Endorsement
- Access to ILAMO
 - ▣ Reference materials – literature & research pertinent to the growth & future of our profession

The list goes on and on....

Just think of the difference you could make in our profession &, in turn, your clinic and patient care



What about the AOA?

- Once affiliated with the AOA through AFOS, all those benefits follow as well
- Optometry is a LEGISLATED PROFESSION
- Membership keeps your profession strong & protects the investment you make in your optometric education!!

For more information go to: www.aoa.org



Besides the Tangible Benefits...What difference will it make if I join or not?

We all need to work together to fight for & protect our rights to practice full scope optometry



In the past year, AOA has...

- Successfully challenged exclusionary glaucoma treatment policy by Tri-West, a Medicare carrier
- Prevented a 4.5% cut in Medicare payments from taking effect
- Overcome efforts to deny the right of optometrists within the VA to be credentialed & privileged to the highest level of practice consistent with their state license

AOA is currently fighting an unprecedented attempt by some in Congress to overturn this policy!!!



So the question now is...

Can you really afford NOT to be a member based on the benefits and overall impact YOU have on our profession and the position you are currently holding!!??



Convinced yet??

Sounds great...but how much is this going to cost?

AFOS is the LEAST expensive state to join on the 51 affiliates of AOA





Sign me up!!

- Fill out an application:
www.afos2020.org/Membership/Application.htm
- **2008 DUES STRUCTURE: paid annual or quarterly**
 - <2 yrs Service.....\$45
 - >2 yrs Service.....\$100
 - Associate.....\$40
 - Student.....\$15
 - Life (Ret.) (1 time pay)....\$250



- **AOA** (For 2008 calendar year)
 - 1st full yr after licensure.....\$71.10
 - 2nd full yr after licensure.....\$142.20
 - 3rd full yr after licensure.....\$355.50
 - 4th full yr after licensure.....\$533.25
 - 5th full yr after licensure... ..\$711.00
- Did we mention that AFOS is the LEAST expensive state to join on the 51 affiliates of AOA?!

Already a member of AOA?

- **THAT'S OKAY!!**
 - You can transfer your primary affiliation to AFOS
- Many states have an associate membership category that allows you to be a member of all 3 organizations since you are in the federal service (AFOS, your state, AOA)

For assistance contact Dr. Steve Sem (execdir@afos2020.org)



Welcome to AFOS!!

More questions???

Go to AFOS2020.org



Web Links

Associations, Institutes, Organizations, Societies

[All About Vision](#)
[Alliance for Aging Research](#)
[American Academy of Ophthalmology](#)
[American Academy of Optometry](#)
[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
[American Optometric Association](#)
[American Optometric Foundation](#)
[Association of Regulatory Boards of Optometry \(ARBO\)](#)
[Council for Refractive Surgery Quality Assurance](#)
[Eye Advisory](#)
[Eye Surgery Education Council](#)
[Glaucoma Research Foundation](#)
[Healthy Vision 2010](#)
[International Glaucoma Association](#)
[NASA Vision Group](#)
[National Eye Research Foundation](#)
[National Keratoconus Foundation](#)
[National Optometric Association](#)
[NBEQ](#)
[Optometric Extension Program](#)
[Optometric Refractive Surgery Society](#)
[Optometrists.org](#)
[ORMS](#)
[Parents Active for Vision Education](#)
[RGP Institute](#)
[Schepens Eye Research Institute](#)
[Vision Council of America](#)
[World Council of Optometry](#)

Conventions and Meetings

[Great Western Council of Optometry](#)
[Heart of America Contact Lens Society](#)
[Midwest Vision Congress & Expo](#)
[Southern Council of Optometrists](#)
[Vision Expo East](#)
[Vision Expo West](#)

Government Health

[Armed Forces Optometric Society](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
[ClinicalTrials.gov](#)
[Federal Registry](#)
[NAVAO](#)

Journals

[American Journal of Ophthalmology](#)
[American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery](#)
[Archives of Ophthalmology](#)
[British Journal of Ophthalmology](#)
[Digital Journal of Ophthalmology](#)
[Eyeworld](#)
[Ocular Surgery News](#)
[Ophthalmology Times](#)
[Ophthalmology](#)
[Primary Care Optometry News](#)
[Primary Eye Care News](#)
[Review of Ophthalmology](#)
[Review of Optometry](#)

Low Vision and Vision Therapy

[American Foundation for the Blind](#)
[Canadian National Institute for the Blind](#)
[Eschenbach Optical](#)
[Foundation for Fighting Blindness](#)
[Lighthouse International](#)
[Low Vision Gateway](#)
[NORA - Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation Association](#)
[Ocutech](#)
[Prevent Blindness America](#)
[State License Renewal Requirements](#)
[Vision and Computers](#)

Ocular Disease

[AMD Alliance International](#)
[American Macular Degeneration Foundation](#)
[Lutein Information](#)
[Macular Degeneration Foundation](#)
[Macular Degeneration International](#)
[Macular Degeneration Network](#)
[Macular Degeneration Partnership](#)
[Macular Disease Society](#)
[MAXIVISION](#)
[Center for Keratoconus](#)
[Chua Eye Page](#)
[Collaborative Longitudinal Evaluation of Keratoconus Study \(CLEK\)](#)
[EyeCancer Network](#)
[Ophthoguide](#)
[Ophtholinx](#)
[Trials Summary](#)

Systemic Disease

[American Diabetes Association](#)
[AskPhysicians.com](#)
[National Headache Foundation](#)
[Siögrens Syndrome Foundation](#)

Ophthalmic Equipment and Medications

[Alcon Laboratories](#)
[Allergan](#)
[BOTOX®](#)
[Carl Zeiss Meditec](#)
[Hilco](#)
[Lombart Instruments](#)
[Medtronic Solan](#)
[Merck](#)
[Novartis Ophthalmics](#)
[Novartis](#)
[Reichert Ophthalmic Instruments](#)
[Reliance Medical Products](#)
[Topcon](#)
[Wilson Ophthalmic](#)

Optometry Schools

[Illinois College Of Optometry](#)
[Indiana University](#)
[Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University](#)
[New England College of Optometry](#)
[Northeastern State University](#)
[NSU College of Optometry](#)
[Ohio State University](#)
[Pacific University](#)
[Pennsylvania College of Optometry](#)
[Southern California College of Optometry](#)
[Southern College of Optometry](#)
[SUNY State College of Optometry](#)
[UAB School of Optometry](#)
[University of California - Berkeley](#)
[University of Houston](#)
[University of Missouri - St. Louis](#)

State Optometry Associations

[Alabama](#)
[Alaska](#)
[Arizona](#)
[Arkansas](#)
[California](#)
[Colorado](#)
[Connecticut](#)
[Florida](#)
[Georgia](#)
[Idaho](#)
[Illinois](#)
[Illinois](#)
[Indiana](#)
[Iowa](#)
[Iowa](#)
[Kansas](#)
[Kentucky](#)
[Maine](#)
[Maryland](#)
[Massachusetts](#)
[Michigan](#)
[Minnesota](#)

[Missouri](#)
[Montana](#)
[Nebraska](#)
[Nevada](#)
[New Hampshire](#)
[New Jersey](#)
[New York](#)
[North Carolina](#)
[North Dakota](#)
[Ohio](#)
[Oklahoma](#)
[Oregon](#)
[Pennsylvania](#)
[South Carolina](#)
[South Dakota](#)
[Tennessee](#)
[Texas](#)
[Utah](#)
[Virginia](#)
[Washington](#)
[West Virginia](#)
[Wisconsin](#)
[Wyoming](#)