

OPTOMETRY PROMOTION INFORMATION GUIDE

Mentor Program POC/VISN 6 Mentor (author): Angela Musick, OD, FAAO
Email: angela.musick1@va.gov

Important References:

- VA Optometry Websites:** <http://www.va.gov/optometry/> (internet) or <http://vaww1.va.gov/OPTOMETRY/index.asp> (intranet)
- Federal Pay Tables Website:** <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/2013/general-schedule/>
- Appendix G5. Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5 (April 15, 2002)
http://www.va.gov/OPTOMETRY/Career_as_VA_Optometrist.asp (link under **Application Documents** section at end of page)
- Optometry Professional Standards Board Checklist
http://www.va.gov/OPTOMETRY/Career_as_VA_Optometrist.asp (link under **Application Documents** section at end of page)
- Employee Recognition and Awards: VA Directive 5017 (April 15, 2002)—(see especially Part V)
<http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/directives-handbooks/Documents/5017-5.DOC> (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website)
- Pay Administration: VA Handbook 5007/10 (February 6, 2004)
http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Direct_hand.htm (**look in 5007/10**) (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website)
- Appendix H4. Procedures for Appointing Optometrists: VA Handbook 5005/8, Part II Appendix H4 (June 22, 2004)
http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Direct_hand.htm (**look in 5005/8**) (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website)
- Rescinded Time-in-Grade Requirements June 14, 2012 per VA Handbook 5005/58 (see part 2(h) of Summary at top)
http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Direct_hand.htm (**look in 5005/58**) (**Note:** this is a VA intranet website):
Older document: Title 38 Time-in-Grade Requirements: VA Handbook 5005/17 Part III Appendix L (June 15, 2006)
- Chapter 5. Within Grade Increases and Periodic Step Increases: VA Handbook 5007/30, Part III Chapter 5 (December 6, 2007)
http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Direct_hand.htm (**look in 5007/30** or **5007/15**) (**Note:** 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

Special Thanks to Dr. L. Roy Thompson for his guidance on several aspects of the information herein, and OPM.gov for such plentiful website information.

Table of Contents:

[General Synopsis of Terms and Pay Grades](#) – *and what is the difference between Title 5 and Title 38?*

[Qualification Standards and Grade Requirements Overview](#)

- 1) [Full Grade \(12\)](#)
- 2) [Intermediate Grade \(13\)](#)
- 3) [Senior Grade \(14\)](#)
- 4) [Chief Grade \(15\)](#)

[Grade Promotion Process](#)

[Step Advancement Process](#)

- 1) [Periodic Step Increases or Within Grade Increases \(WIGI\)](#)
- 2) [Special Advancement for Performance \(SAP\)](#)
- 3) [Special Advancement for Achievement \(SAA\)](#)

[Tips and Recommendations for Efficient Advancement](#) (**VERY IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW**)

[Example Promotion Request](#) **(LEARN TO WRITE A REQUEST)**

[Frequently Asked Promotion Questions](#) **(LEARN TO PLAN YOUR CAREER)**

- 1) [What about Time-in-Grade requirements?](#)
- 2) Does an SAA affect my WIGI?
- 3) [Board Certification?](#)
- 4) Chief Grade at a CBOC?
- 5) [Do I need FAAO to get to Intermediate, Senior, or Chief Grade?](#)
- 6) [What can I expect on Boarding?](#)
- 7) Will my Grade advancement clash with my WIGI?
- 8) [How do the requirements for GS-14 Senior translate into real world requirements?](#)
- 9) [How do the requirements for GS-15 Chief translate into real world requirements?](#)
- 10) What accomplishments warrant a step increase?

[Plan Ahead Advice!](#) **(PLANNING TOWARD CHIEF GRADE)**

[Addendum A: List of VISN Mentors](#)

[Addendum B: Other Items of Interest](#)

- 1) [Incentive Awards: Information for When a Promotion May Not Be Possible](#)
- 2) [H.R 2647 Defense Authorization Act 2010: Legal Changes of Interest](#)
 - a) [Credit for Unused Sick Leave](#)
 - b) [Non-Foreign Area Retirement Equity Assurance](#)

[Addendum C: Can You "Buy Back" Your VA Residency Year Toward Retirement?](#)

General Synopsis of Terms and Pay Grades:

Federal pay levels are called pay *grades*, and one's grade determines one's salary range (follow the link to the [Federal Pay Table for 2013](#)). 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 or simply 12-9), whereas someone in the first part of that same grade might be at the level of GS-12, step 2.

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 promotions 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 5019: Occupational Health Services http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm/Directives-Handbooks/Direct_hand.htm)
- 5) English language proficiency.

Grade Requirements Overview:

Associate Grade (GS-11): Basic requirements only.

Full Grade (GS-12): TWO YEARS OF OPTOMETRIC PRACTICE OR ITS EQUIVALENT [*is still required*]. One year of approved residency training or its creditable equivalent acceptable to the [Accreditation] Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association is acceptable in lieu of the 2 years of practice. Candidate must have demonstrated the professional competence and performance necessary to provide independently the full range of clinical optometric diagnosis and treatment for all the most prevalent types of vision dysfunctions and the detection and referral of patients with ocular disease or ocular manifestations of systemic disease.

*** [See Plan Ahead Advice](#)

NOTE: While overall time-in-grade requirements are rescinded for Title 38 employees, 2 years of optometric practice (or its equivalent) is required, per the qualification standards, in order to achieve Full Grade.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Intermediate Grade (GS-13): Meets the requirements in paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) below:

- 1) FOUR YEARS OF OPTOMETRIC PRACTICE OR ITS EQUIVALENT [*is still required*]. One year of approved residency training or its creditable equivalent acceptable to the [Accreditation] Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association is acceptable in lieu of 2 years of practice.
- 2) The optometrist at this level has successfully passed the examinations of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry and has attained either of the following:
 - a) The stature that would warrant appointment at the clinical instructor or higher level at a school or college of optometry.
 - b) The professional ability and personal attributes which have merited significant recognition by a recognized professional organization, such as election to a Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry.
- 3) Has achieved a high level of professional attainment as illustrated by one or more of the following examples:
 - a) Is a recognized expert in the diagnosis and treatment of unusual and complicated visual dysfunctions. Typically, in this capacity serves as a consultant to optometrist and other professionals in other health facilities or provides expert clinical services in such areas as the partially sighted or contact lenses for aphasics.
 - b) Has assumed responsibility for a multi-faceted optometric program including clinical research and/or training requiring a high degree of competence and skill in developing innovative and new and advanced instrumentation and treatment techniques. Typically, the program is in an educationally affiliated health care facility having an optometric training program of moderate scope involving liaison with other medical services and affiliated schools.
 - c) Has played a significant part in the conduct of vision research in a problem area of considerable scope and complexity which required novel approaches and which resulted in answers to important questions or important changes in existing methods and techniques. Publications authored by the optometrist are of considerable value to others in the individual's field. Typically, overall contributions are recognized by serving on important committees or other bodies in the profession.
 - d) Has had full responsibility for carrying out an optometric training program of significant size in which the optometrist has been responsible for maintaining liaison with the affiliated school and other educational institutions and professional or scientific organizations. Innovative approaches in development of curriculum and course content and in expanding and improving the educational program have been displayed by the individual.

*** [See Plan Ahead Advice](#)

NOTE: While overall time-in-grade requirements are rescinded for Title 38 employees, 4 years of optometric practice (or its equivalent) is required, per the qualification standards, in order to achieve Intermediate Grade *and above*.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Senior Grade (GS-14): *Meets the requirements for Intermediate grade* and the requirements in paragraphs (1) and (2) below:

- 1) The optometrist at this level possesses such academic stature as would warrant a faculty appointment of a professional level in an approved school or college of optometry.
- 2) Has demonstrated recognized superior professional attainment as evidenced by one or more of the following examples:
 - a) Has 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. There is such confidence in the optometrist at this level that there is unusual support of the individual's recommendations and conclusions.
 - b) Has had responsibility for carrying out a major optometric program segment on a national level.
 - c) Has conducted high level studies in a difficult area of vision research which has contributed to a substantial advance in the health field, with important professional publications.

*** [See Plan Ahead Advice](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Chief Grade (GS-15): *Meets the requirements for Senior grade* and must demonstrate a sustained very high level of professional performance with evidence of exceptional professional and/or administrative development by the following:

- 1) Has assumed substantial professional and/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, the optometrist at this level has had responsibility 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 development of new and/or revised concepts and programs having a major impact upon the academic, medical, and optometric communities.
- 2) Outstanding professional attainment. Examples of such attainment are:
 - a) Achievement of outstanding results in research which are regarded as having a major impact on advancing the field.
 - b) Significant number of noteworthy publications in professional journals.

NOTE: While the standards are quoted within the Full, Intermediate, Senior and Chief grade portions above, 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 full standards should be directed to the actual notice in the VA Handbook which may be reached through the [OD Qualification Standards Link](#). Also check the [FAQ](#) section of this document for hints on how the standards translate into Real World Requirements.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Grade Promotion Process:

If you have met the requirements for advancement listed within the [Qualification Standards](#), your supervisor will need to recommend your promotion to the next grade. It is a good idea to discuss your plans with your supervisor ahead of time, to insure a smooth process. 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 at your station.

Once your supervisor approves the request for promotion, the process will usually need concurrence by the Service Chief, Chief of Staff, and the Medical Center Director. Some VAs also have a Committee that looks at all requests to determine whether the budget can handle it. From there, it will often head to Human Resources (HR). Your HR rep can probably explain the process in full, but HR has to put the packet together and send it to the Optometry Professional Standards Board (PSB) at the VA Central Office in Washington, D.C. If the PSB approves your promotion and *recommends* for advancement, the packet makes a stop at the VA Central Office HR Department for processing before returning to your local VA. **Your promotion is not in effect until your Director signs it.** Then it goes back to HR for the finishing touches. Get to know your HR Rep ahead of time, since it generally proves efficient to give that person a 'heads up' on the process. **(Note: There may be extra steps in this process locally, so be sure to find out exactly how your VA does things.)**

The Professional Standards Board is composed of three members at any given time. The Director of Optometry Service is the Chairman of the PSB, 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. Nearly all files from your employment record are being uploaded or are currently located on the VA eOPF website: <https://eopf.nbc.gov/va/eOPF%20Splash.aspx>.) Your request will need copies of the forms and information on the [PSB Checklist](#):

- 1) Cover letter with request information and Human Resources Point of Contact
- 2) Standard Form 50-B: Notification of Personnel Action showing Employee's Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG)
- 3) Curriculum Vitae (updated)
- 4) Latest SF 50-B: Notification of Personnel Action
- 5) Last 3 Proficiency Reports (or what is available)
- 6) Last 3 Board Actions Reports (or what is available) approved by Facility Director
- 7) Recommendation from the rating official
- 8) Evidence of Successful Completion of NBEO exams (for Intermediate Grade and higher)
- 9) Full Grade: Two (2) years optometric practice or its equivalent. One year of approved residency training or its creditable equivalent acceptable to the ACOE of the American Optometric Association is acceptable in lieu of 2 years of practice, and meet the qualification standards requirements.

10) *Intermediate Grade, **Senior Grade or **Chief Grade: Four (4) years of optometric practice or its equivalent. One year of approved residency training or its creditable equivalent acceptable to the ACOE of the American Optometric Association is acceptable in lieu of 2 years of practice. *Meet qualification standards requirements. **Meet qualification standards requirements for the next lower grade level, and the grade being requested.

11) **ALSO: Evidence** of meeting the requirements for the grade promotion for which you are applying

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Step Advancement Process:

The process for step advancement 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 advancements are also subject to the approval/recommendation by the Optometry Professional Standards Board (except for WIGIs), and require the specific paperwork when presented to the Board:

- 1) Cover letter with request information with Request Information and Human Resources Point of Contact
- 2) SF 50-B Showing Employee's Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG)
- 3) Curriculum Vitae (updated)
- 4) Latest Standard Form 50-B: Notification of Personnel Action
- 5) Last 3 Proficiency Reports, including a current report (or what is available)
- 6) Last 3 Board Actions Reports (or what is available) approved by Facility Director
- 7) 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 may be true for other professions). Please reference:*

[Within Grade Increases and Periodic Step Increases: VA Handbook 5007/15, Part III Chapter 5.](#)

Question: A question was raised as to whether the date of the WIGI will be reset when someone receives an increase from an SAP or an SAA. Let's say a doc has an ADG of October 16, 2008, then received a 3-step SAA in on December 24, 2009. The question was: is he/she **still** eligible for a WIGI on October 16, 2010?

Answer: Yes. The WIGI is also a somewhat "automatic" HR issue, and the doc doesn't need to request anything. The WIGI time-frame is on a 2-year schedule based solely on a person's Anniversary Date of **Grade**, so every 2 years after the date that a person is placed at his/her current **grade**, he/she will be eligible for a Periodic Step Increase (provided he/she is not already at step 10). The caveat to this is that occasionally human errors do take place, and an HR representative will accidentally reset a person's ADG after a step advancement. The take home: *It is generally a good idea to check the official record after any advancement to make sure your ADG is listed correctly.*

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

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 Professional Standards Board. The request must be made to Human Resources at least 90 days prior to the scheduled 2-year periodic step increase (or WIGI), and once approved, the increased pay rate and step will take effect on the Anniversary Date of Grade.

According to VA Handbook 5017, Part V: [Employee Recognition and Awards](#): Criteria for Special Advancement for Performance (SAP), “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. Two steps may be granted when employee is at the eighth step of the grade. 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*” [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](#).

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

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 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 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 podiatric, optometric, or chiropractic 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.)

NOTE: According to a source in Human Resources, the rules for achieving an SAP may be 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 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) **Speak with other optometrists and your facility supervisors.** Remember, if you’ve seen one VA, you’ve seen ONLY one VA. Leadership is different at each facility, and requests for advancement need to be approved by local leadership. Knowing what the Optometry PSB expects is a necessity, but **the Optometry PSB makes recommendations** to your facility director or leadership, and **the local leadership has the final right of approval**. Find out what your local leaders expect for promotions and advancements.
- 3) At this point in time, being elected into Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry (FAAO) or passing the Advanced Competence in Medical Optometry (ACMO) exam (or other such nationally standardized test) warrants a

New!

recommendation for a 3-step increase when requested as a Special Advancement for Achievement (SAA) award. Good to know when you are at a step 6 or 7 within your grade.

- 4) Plan your advancements carefully and with diligence. Remember that you cannot apply for a step increase at the same that you apply for a grade promotion; it has to be one or the other.

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 your next grade promotion, but if you use an accomplishment to receive a grade promotion, 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 by the qualification standards. 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. *After her grade promotion*, upon being elected as a Fellow in the Academy, she could request a Special Advancement for Achievement, warranting recommendation for a 3-step increase and putting her at the GS-13, step 9 pay rate. Well thought out, Dr. Yu!! (**ONE MORE NOTE:** If she chooses this route, Dr. Yu should not become a Fellow of the Academy until AFTER her next grade promotion is instated. Timing is important and will be explained in a later tip.)

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). She would then need to find another way to advance within the grade...perhaps she would then publish an article or participate in professional organizations.

- 5) 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 promotion, 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 approximately 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.... The necessity for a pay increase equivalent to *greater than 2* steps 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. It is best to advance from a position of strength, so try to be at or near the top of your current grade when applying for a promotion. ☺)
- 6) 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 up to Intermediate grade as well as periodic step increases and Special Advancement for Performance (SAP) increases. You will want to request any SAPs around 90-120 days before your next periodic step increase takes effect.
- 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 or accomplishments and offer you the increases you deserve. It's best not to throw everything at this person at one time anyway. Let your supervisors and leadership 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. *Remember, anything on your CV that you will use to advance will need to be accompanied by evidentiary support.*
- 9) Be specific in your requests. Have you published quite a few articles that you think would warrant a 5-step increase for an SAA? Go ahead and request to your heart's desire. The Professional Standards Board or your local facility director may overrule you and offer fewer steps, but wouldn't you hate to request (and receive) only one step, when you could have advanced three?
- 10) Be prepared to think outside the box sometimes. The Qualification Standards outline some of the things that are acceptable when applying for a promotion, but should a doc go above and beyond? Should an optometrist opt to take part in local or Medical Center activities that may not pertain to optometry, such as assisting teaching BLS at the

medical center, submitting a Newsletter article (non-peer reviewed and therefore not contributing to the requirements for Chief Grade), or getting involved in a Medical Center Committee?

The traditional approach seems to be “well if it’s not optometry-related, I won’t waste my time” or “if it’s not an article that will fulfill the Chief Grade requirements, it’s not worth anything.” But... consider this: **Any time you enter a request for promotion or advancement, that request has to make it past several hurdles before it ever sees the Optometry PSB.** The Optometry Board knows what applies to optometry and what doesn’t, and so may your supervisor (if you have a Chief of Optometry), but what about your Chief of Surgery/Primary Care, Chief of Staff, or your Director? Contributing regularly at your facility goes a long way to making a good local impression, and getting involved can assist you or your clinic in many ways.

Consider as well that while a clinical Newsletter article, medical center activity, or a local committee assignment might not really apply to a grade promotion request, it can certainly spruce up an anemic request for SAA or SAP. Each of these types of contributions may not be worthy of advancement when standing alone, but they can certainly punch up a memo asking for advancement. When you publish a journal article, why apply for a 2-step increase when you could possibly request a 3-step if you have been more active in federal healthcare, the VA, and other optometric interests? Just a thought!

- 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 and it actually goes into effect. **Any achievements made on your part during the interim (from the time you submit for the step advancement or grade promotion to the time it goes into effect) will be counted as if they were part of the advancement package already being submitted/reviewed.** What does this mean? Let’s say you are at a Grade13-Step10 and you put in for a grade promotion in October, planning to get to a Grade14-Step 6 when the promotion goes through. Thinking that you will probably receive your promotion by May, you sign up to take the ACMO in June of the very next year (after all, it is worth a 3 step increase, right?) This seems like good planning...it sounds efficient, and you hope to put in for advancement about one year after requesting a grade promotion. 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 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, the date on the ACMO falls **before** your new Anniversary Date of Grade...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 an SAA/SAP type of advancement. Just remember that your achievements need to be dated **after** your latest promotion’s **effective date.**

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Example Promotion Requests:

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. Remember that while promotions are *recommended* through the Optometry PSB, your local leadership will need to officially approve any advancement requests. You want to make sure that your supervisor, Chief, and local director are behind your promotion request.

It will generally be up to you to see that the request is made (make sure you have met the qualification standards requirements first, then CHECK WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR regarding the local process). Generally, your best bet is to take care of as much of the process yourself as possible ...other people involved in the process *usually* appreciate having less to do (this is a very general statement, of course). The following are example memos and a good place to start (you may want to use the VA Standard Forms memo). **A cover letter is a good idea and a professional touch.**

IMPORTANT: Make sure that you provide documentation to support any and all claims within the promotion or advancement request. Nothing may be considered by the board unless accompanied by evidentiary support.

ALSO: When promoting to **Chief Grade**, consider using only the **level** of the grade in your request and cover letter (GS-15 or Grade 15), instead of the term *Chief Grade*. Many non-ODs (and some ODs) still equate the term “Chief” with a rank-in-position title (see [General Synopsis of Terms and Pay Grades](#)) and believe that a person cannot be at Chief Grade without holding a *Chief of Optometry* title or other supervisory position (this is not the case for Title 38s, as we are rank-in-person). Sometimes using a different term *may* avoid a misunderstanding. Not a guaranteed fix, but worth a try!

Department of Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: April 4, 1920
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 – Present: I served as 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: _____

Roland Stone, OD, FAAO
Chief, Optometry Section

Signature: _____

Carter L. O'Pay, MD
Chief, Surgical Care Service Line

Department of Veterans Affairs

Memorandum

Date: April 4, 1920
From: I.M. Here, OD, FAAO
Subject: Request Consideration for Promotion to Senior Grade - 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 promotion to **Senior grade**. I have fulfilled the requirements for promotion as set forth in Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5:
 - a. As required by Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5, Section B, D:1, "*The optometrist at this level possesses such academic stature as would warrant a faculty appointment of a professional level in an approved school or college of optometry*,"
 - i. Currently appointed to the Anywhere College of Osteopathic Medicine with the accompanying title of *Part-time Faculty Instructor, Clinical Track, Discipline of Optometry*
 - ii. Currently appointed as Adjunct Faculty at University of Guam—Eye Doctor School
 - b. As indicated by Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5, Section B, D:2 (a), "*Has 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*,"
 - i. 1916-1918: Represented Anywhere VAMC at the VISN Eye Collaborative
 1. Serving as primary coordinator for optical contract issues for the VISN
 - ii. 1917-1918: Secretary/Treasurer for MyState Optometric Association
 - c. As indicated by Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5, Section B, D:2 (b), "*Has had responsibility for carrying out a major optometric program segment on a national level*,"
 - i. Currently serve the Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) as Chair of the Wonderful Committee
 - d. As indicated by Optometrist Qualification Standard: VA Handbook 5005, Part II Appendix G5, Section B, D:2, "*Has demonstrated recognized superior professional attainment...*"
 - i. Established a student externship program with the University of Guam—Eye Doctor School in April of 1916; currently the liaison between the Anywhere VAMC Eye Clinic and UGEDS
 - ii. Serving as a Consultant for the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) since December of 1916
 - iii. Serving as a member of the Anywhere VAMC MyHealth@Vet Process Action Committee
 - iv. Presentation: Here IM. Good Name for a Poster. Southern Educational Congress of Optometry, Atlanta, GA. February 1916.
 - v. Presentation: Here IM, Here UB. Nother Good Name. Armed Forces Optometric Society Continuing Education Conference, Atlanta, GA. February 1916.
 - vi. Presentation: Here IM, Here UB, Cold IM. Impressive Name for a Presentation. American Academy of Optometry Conference, BigTown, US. November 1918.
2. Thank you for your time and attention for consideration of my advancement to senior grade.

I.M. Here, OD, FAAO

Circle: Concur Do Not Concur

Circle: Concur Do Not Concur

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Roland Stone, OD, FAAO

Carter L. O'Pay, MD

Chief, Optometry Section

Chief, Surgical Care Service Line

Frequently Asked Promotion Questions:

1) *Per VA Handbook 5005/58 (June 14, 2012), the Time-in-Grade requirements were eliminated for Title 38 employees. What does this mean for me? What has changed?*

Good question! Everyone is excited about this change, and it is certainly a positive thing for Title 38 employees, especially for our young optometrists or new optometrists. The only thing that has changed, though, is the time-in-grade requirement. The optometry qualification standards are the same, as are the rules for advancement from one grade to another (see [Tips and Recommendations #4](#)).

This means that 2 years of optometric practice (or equivalent) are required to be placed at Full grade (12), and that 4 years of practice (or equivalent) are required to achieve Intermediate grade or above (13 and up). That has not changed, as the qualification standards still stand. You will note that in order to achieve Senior grade, an OD “meets the requirement for intermediate grade” as well as those for Senior grade. As well, in order to achieve Chief grade, a person “meets the requirement for senior grade” as well as those for Chief grade and “must demonstrate a sustained very high level of professional performance with evidence of exceptional professional and/or administrative development”. This has not changed. What has changed is the amount of time required to wait before requesting a promotion. Professional standards board recommendations will be based on the qualification standards alone.

What does this mean for the individual OD? For those go-getters who get involved early, plan early, publish early, and become leaders early... you may be able to promote earlier now.

2) *HR from one VA indicated to an optometrist that a special advancement award moves back the periodic step increase (PSI)—aka within grade increase (WGI)—that takes place every 2yrs. Sometimes the regulations are so confusing that even human resources cannot make sense of them. Here is what we found:*

While this may seem to be true according to [Pay Administration: VA Handbook 5007/10 \(February 6, 2004\)](#), where it states:

b. Conditions of Eligibility for a Periodic Step Increase (PSI). A PSI will be granted when:

- (1) An employee’s work is of an acceptable level of competence;
- (2) No “equivalent increase” in compensation was received during the period under consideration; and
- (3) The benefit of successive step increases shall be preserved for any person whose continuous service is interrupted by active military duty.

The definition of “equivalent increase” comes into play. If we search further for a definition of this particular phrase, we find that general cost of living increases and special advancements for performance/achievement are not considered to be equivalent increases.

Also, OPM.gov has offered a wonderful definition of “equivalent increase”:

An "equivalent increase" is considered to occur at the time of any of the following personnel actions:

- A within-grade increase, excluding (1) a quality step increase, or (2) an interim WGI if that increase is later terminated
- A promotion (permanent or temporary) to a higher grade
- Application of the maximum payable rate rule in 5 CFR 531.221 that results in a higher step rate within the employee's GS grade, except for application of that rule in a demotion to the extent that the employee's rate of basic pay after demotion does not exceed the lowest step rate that equals or exceeds the employee's rate of basic pay immediately before the demotion (For example, in 2009 a GS-13, step 3, employee (\$75,323 GS rate) accepts a voluntary demotion to a GS-12 position. The agency sets her pay using the maximum payable rate rule at GS-12, step 10 (\$77,194 GS rate). The increase in pay is not an equivalent increase because the employee's pay was set at the lowest step that exceeded her rate of basic pay before promotion.)
- Application of the superior qualifications and special needs pay-setting authority in 5 CFR 531.212 that results in a higher step rate within the employee's GS grade

5 CFR 531: http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=3b2d8db06d66736cc1e104d5988a0cb7&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title05/5cfr531_main_02.tpl

A check with the human resources department at the Salem VAMC agrees that an SAA or an SAP would not affect an employee’s PSI. Sometimes a human error may be involved though, see also the box in [Periodic Step Increases](#).

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

3) *I’ve been told that I am now “Board Certified.” Can I apply for a Grade or Step increase based on that?*

I have received many questions about this. Would this meet the 2nd paragraph under the Qualification Standard for Intermediate Grade? Is it worth a 3-step increase like becoming a Fellow in the American Academy of Optometry?

Remember, the Qualification Standard for Intermediate Grade addresses the following: “significant recognition by a recognized professional organization.” At this point in time, there is no single, specific organization within optometry providing Board Certification that is recognized by our profession as a whole, or even by the VA for that matter. While

there are organizations that may be offering Board Certificates (and it may behoove a person to obtain one for future use, or even to keep a piece of history), at this point in time, we really do not know which Board will be nationally recognized down the road.

It is best to stick to the Qualification Standards as they are written at this time. Plan your career and promotions as if you were not expecting anything out of the entire Board Certification process. If things change and Board Certification eases your way to promote, you still will not have wasted your time.

NOTE: At this time, the only equivalent, merit-based step in the BC process pertains to the testing required for some board certification organizations. Right now, the PSB plans to recognize and give equal consideration to the **nationally standardized** tests (ex: ACMO or ABO testing).

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

Yes, you can get to GS-14 and even GS-15 from a CBOC, but it usually takes more planning.

5) Do I have to become a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry to get to Intermediate, Senior or Chief Grade?

No. How's that for a simple answer? There is no place in the Qualification Standards where it states that Fellowship in the Academy is a requirement to promote past Full Grade.

While the simple answer really is "no," the implications are a little (though not much) more complicated. In order to promote from Full to Intermediate Grade an OD must attain either of the following:

- a) The stature that would warrant appointment at the clinical instructor or higher level at a school or college of optometry.
- b) The professional ability and personal attributes which have merited significant recognition by a recognized professional organization, **such as** election to a Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry.

The Qualification Standards require **either** stature that would warrant appointment as a clinical instructor **or** recognition by a professional organization *such as* the American Academy of Optometry... not both. Take note that although many of us read that second part as a requirement to become a Fellow in the Academy, even that part of the standard is vaguely written. Fellowship is a good suggestion and is automatically declared by the Qualification Standard to be acceptable. This does not mean that recognition from other organizations would not be acceptable. Anything else would require a ruling by the Professional Standards Board.

The Qualification Standards for Senior and Chief Grade never even mention Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry, and attaining a level of Fellowship in the Academy after achieving the level of Intermediate Grade would not be of any use in promoting to Senior or Chief Grade. It **would** be of use as a 3-step increase within a grade, though (see [Tips and Recommendations for Efficient and Successful Advancement](#)). Many of us, as VA optometrists and educators, strive to become Fellows and support the Academy. We encourage each other in that endeavor and there are several among the VA ranks who have even achieved the rank of Diplomate.

6) What should I expect when boarding? For example, if I know of someone who is planning to come from private practice into the VA system, at what level would that person be brought in?

While it is not entirely possible to predict what the Professional Standards Board will recommend when a new employee is boarded, the board adheres to the [Optometry Qualification Standards](#) which can be found on the [website](#).

Note: A new employee who is brought in directly after finishing a residency (or soon thereafter), can generally expect to be recommended (by the PSB) at the level of Grade 12, Step 10. This is not a rule or law, just an observation, and local facilities may have different standards or may overrule the PSB.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

7) I'm at a step 9 within my grade, and I am due for my next within-grade increase (WIGI) at the same time I am eligible for a promotion to the next grade. If I apply for my grade promotion, will I lose my WIGI? (In other words: Will I be promoting from a step 9 in my grade to a step 5 in the next, or will I move up to a step 10 first so that I can promote to a step 6 in the next grade?)

That is a very good question. Keep in mind that WIGI increases are an HR issue, while grade promotions are more of a PSB/director issue. Consider these things:

- 1) When you apply for the grade promotion, you will not likely receive it **exactly** when you want to. In fact, that is highly doubtful. You can aim for an exact date, but unless your Anniversary Date of Grade (ADG) falls at the beginning of a pay period, there isn't even a slim chance of the promotion taking place on the exact date of your ADG.

- 2) If you time your request right (perhaps about 3 months before your ADG in order to get the grade promotion at least close to that date), and **if** the request gets through all the red tape in a timely fashion (a really big **if**), 2 things could happen:
 - a. Your grade promotion could go through early, and your director has the option of signing it into effect up to 2 weeks before your current ADG (this is unlikely at many VA's)
 - i. If this happens, you may not get the WIGI, since you have not been at your current grade long enough, and the WIGI goes through on the **exact date** of the ADG
 - b. Your grade promotion will go through, but not go into effect until after your ADG
 - i. If this happens, you will get the WIGI automatically beforehand

I spoke with an HR rep, and he says that the HR department here tries to look out for the employees. **If they know or notice** that a WIGI is coming up, they try to get the director to hold off signing a grade promotion into effect until just after the WIGI. There is apparently a little leeway and they try to always do this to the benefit of the employee, but he could not speak for other HR departments, since this is a thoughtful courtesy that they provide in Salem.

You could do one of several things to try to get your grade promotion on time and still get the WIGI:

- 1) Speak to your HR rep and see what the policy is at your VA... then do what needs to be done
- 2) Wait until after the WIGI has passed to submit for a grade promotion (or at least submit close enough to your ADG that you know it won't go through quickly enough to keep you from your WIGI)
 - a. This is the safest bet
- 3) Submit a little earlier, but speak to your HR rep or director, make them aware of your upcoming WIGI, and request that any grade advancement not be signed into effect until after your ADG

In these instances, it's always good to contact your HR rep. They can be very helpful with all of this.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

8) **How do the standards 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 at a VISN, 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.

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

- 1) Join the **Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS—<http://www.afos2020.org/>)**. We often forget that AFOS is an international organization that represents **all** of federal optometry (in spite of the name) at the AOA as our “state” organization. **AFOS is important to VA Optometry on many levels.** To join see <http://www.afos2020.org/Default.aspx?pageId=1282344>. To get involved, you must be an AFOS/AOA member in good standing:
 - a. Contact the Executive Director through the website and ask if there are committees that need help. AFOS has the following Committees (see <http://www.afos2020.org/Default.aspx?pageId=1282335> for descriptions):

Awards Committee	Meetings Committee
Continuing Education Committee	Membership Committee
Marketing and Communications	Paraoptometric Committee

- b. Read the quarterly Newsletter or see the Committee Descriptions page (above) and contact the Committee Chairs to see if there is a need for assistance on their respective committees.
- c. Attend the FSO meeting in the spring (in conjunction with SECO) or the fall AFOS Annual meeting (in conjunction with the Academy meeting), meet your fellow federal service ODs, and offer to help.

- There has been some confusion, so it is important to note that both the FSO (Federal Service Optometry) meeting and the AFOS Annual meeting are conducted by AFOS. At one time the FSO meeting was *conducted* by AFOS, but *hosted* by different branches of federal optometry each year. At that time the FSO meeting lasted nearly a week. In 2008, AFOS members voted to shorten the FSO meeting and allow the CE Committee to plan the CE for both meetings.
 - The FSO Meeting (mainly a continuing education meeting) is offered in conjunction with the spring SECO meeting in Atlanta, GA. The Annual Meeting, which offers both continuing education and opportunities for greater involvement within AFOS, is offered in conjunction with the annual AAO Meeting in the fall.
- d. Get involved with the AFOS Council (see <http://www.afos2020.org/Default.aspx?pageld=1282335> for descriptions and information). This will require getting deeply involved in AFOS and may take several years to achieve.
- 2) Join the **National Association of VA Optometrists (NAVAO—<http://www.navao.org/>)** and get involved. NAVAO is our national organization within the VA, where we represent ourselves and discuss our own issues. The Annual Meeting for NAVAO is held during the Academy Meeting in the fall. Attend that meeting and get to know other VA optometrists. Getting involved may mean:
- a. Volunteer!
 - b. Run for office. NAVAO has the following offices:

President	Immediate Past President
Vice President	Membership Director
Secretary	Newsletter Editor
Treasurer	Member-at-Large (2)

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

- 3) Become a **Fellow** in the **American Academy of Optometry (AAO—<http://www.aaopt.org/>)**, and get involved in that organization.
- a. Fellowship in AAO is an honor and a privilege. It takes some planning and effort, but once you have achieved the level of Fellow in the Academy, it's a good idea to get more involved in the organization. (Remember that Fellowship in the Academy can assist in gaining GS-13 Intermediate Grade within the VA, or you can use the accomplishment to assist in obtaining a 3-step increase.)
 - b. Becoming a Diplomat within AAO is also an honor and a privilege. It involves a great deal of hard work and dedication, and anyone who achieves such a level of recognition is deserving of ample respect, but contrary to popular belief, Diplomat status is **not** a requirement for committee, section, or Board of Directors involvement within the AAO. This may be very good news to many of us!
 - c. Section involvement is one way to get involved. Attending section meetings is an easy way to meet the officers and express a desire to get involved, or you can try to contact the AAO offices directly. Once on the website, select [Contact Us] in the upper right hand corner of the screen (<http://www.aaopt.org/about/who/where/>). The next screen will show contact information for Academy leaders and staff, including the Executive Director. Some Sections and Committees are listed below.

Sections	Committees
Binocular Vision Perception and Pediatrics	Admittance Committee
Cornea, Contact Lenses, and Refractive Technologies	Awards Committee
Disease	Chapters Committee
Low Vision—the Low Vision section is known to be very active	Communications Committee
Optometric Education	Education Quality Assurance Committee
Primary Care	Exhibits Committee
Public Health and Environmental Optometry	Faculty Student Liaison Committee
Vision Science	Lectures and Workshops Committee
	Membership Committee
	Nominating Committee
	Research Committee
	Scientific Program Committee

- d. If committee involvement is desired, contact the current AAO Board of Directors' President-elect. Volunteers are *appointed* to committees by the President-elect for 2-year terms. The appointments are made at the annual meeting during even-numbered years.
- If your interest involves CE planning, consider the Lectures and Workshops Committee, the Research Committee, or the Scientific Programs Committee.

- The Education Quality Assurance Committee looks for volunteers to sit in on presentations and assess the quality of the presentation. Members should expect to allow two ½-days at the Academy meeting in order to fulfill this commitment.
- e. Election to the AAO Board of Directors is a multi-step process that involves nomination by the Nominating Committee, completion of the requested paperwork, interviewing with the Nominating Committee, and election by the membership. Each office is a 2-year appointment, but many appointees are re-elected and move up within the offices of the Board.
 - f. Another type of involvement within the Academy is Chapter involvement. Many states or organizations have a local Chapter. For some of us, this may be a more feasible way to participate. To contact a local Chapter, go to the Academy website, and click on [Current Fellows] in green menu at the top of the page, then click on [Academy Chapters] on the left hand side of the page: (<http://www.aaopt.org/about/chapters>).
- 4) Join the **American Optometric Association (AOA—<http://www.aoa.org>)** and get involved. The AOA is an enormous machine in its own right, and there are many ways to become involved. Once a member you may:
 - a. 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.*
 - b. Join your state organization and get involved at the local level. *I still think the best way for any federal OD to join the AOA is through AFOS (our “state” organization), but most federal optometrists may join their local state organization as well as joining through AFOS. That offers two different ways to make a difference at the state level.*
 - c. Get involved at the national level. The easiest way to do this is to get more involved in a state organization and express a desire to work on the national level. Another way to get more involved would be to join one of the three following AOA Sections: Contact Lens & Cornea Section, Vision Rehabilitation Section, and Sports Vision Section.
 - d. Involvement in the committee structure of the AOA is by Board appointment only, though you may request a nomination from your local “state” or local society.
 - e. Remember though: some types of political activities are frowned upon for federal employees, so before getting **politically** involved in *any* organization, make sure you have read VA policy on the subject and familiarize yourself with the Hatch Act (<http://www.osc.gov/hatchact.htm>).

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

- 5) Join **AMSUS—The Society of the Federal Health Agencies** (formerly the Association of Military Surgeons—US) (<http://www.amsus.org>) and get involved.
 - a. AMSUS has annual meetings, and VA optometrists have been involved in planning these. Every year a different branch of federal service medicine hosts the annual meeting, and when the VA hosts the meeting, it is a **great** time to get involved. (VA hosted the November 2011 meeting).
 - b. *Every* annual meeting, even when VA is not hosting, needs volunteers from each branch of the federal service, and every annual meeting has an Optometry Section. One way to participate is to simply volunteer to work with the current year’s Optometry Section (or even volunteer to chair that section, if you are willing to work hard).
 - c. Contact AMSUS by email at amsus@amsus.org to volunteer. You may also contact the meeting coordinator Lindsay Bloom at meetings@amsus.org or by calling AMSUS directly (301-897-8800 ext.16), or go to the annual meeting and offer to help from there.
- 6) Join the **American Public Health Association (APHA—<http://www.apha.org/>)** and get involved.
 - a. APHA has 25 sections, one of which is a Vision Care, but ODs may be involved in many of the sections. Each section has a Leadership Roster and Section Officers. Contacting one of these officers would be a good start.
 - b. APHA has an annual meeting in the fall (usually October or November) that takes place in various cities throughout the US. Plan to attend a meeting and volunteer while there, or contact APHA directly through the website.
 - c. APHA also has State Affiliates, where ODs can participate locally. More information about the state affiliates can be found at: <http://www.apha.org/membergroups/states/StateRegPHA/default.htm>.
- 7) Get involved with your own State Board. Many VA ODs have officer positions on state boards.

- 8) Get involved in national, local or VISN VA committees. Contact the Chief of Optometry, Chief of Surgery, or other in-the-know people at your medical center to see if there are committees you can join. There are also several established VA Optometry organizations that are sometimes in need of volunteers or appointees, such as:
- a. **VISN Mentor Positions.** *These do not come up often, but when a Mentor position opens up, it needs to be filled.*
 - Remember that Mentors must have a detailed knowledge of the promotions process (beyond just reading this guide). Though ODs are not *required* to be at Senior or Chief grade in order to participate, it is advised. One should have achieved *at least* the level of Intermediate Grade, Step 10, along with a working knowledge of promotions within the VA (in other words, one should have been promoted *at least* one grade and preferably have received at least one step increase through SAA or SAP). It would be unwise and unfair to undertake a position as advisor to other doctors without the knowledge or ability to back up the advice.
 - *Mentoring may require a good deal of one-on-one or even face-to-face time with other docs, and it definitely requires responding to emails in a timely fashion.*
 - b. **Tele-retinal imaging.** *This program must be coordinated on many levels, from the eye care perspective, to primary care, to IRM concerns. It is a large undertaking, and the VA takes the program very seriously.*
 - Each medical center has a point of contact for this.
 - Each VISN has a Tele-retinal Imaging Coordinator.
 - There are ways to get involved at a national level, though that *will* take a great deal of time and effort. There is an Optometry Field Advisory Committee sub-committee assigned to this program.
 - Several assigned imaging centers with trained imaging readers (eye docs) are dispersed throughout the US.
 - c. **Systems Redesign** (formerly Advanced Clinic Access). *This VA section is important. It is a good place to get involved.*
 - Every medical center has a committee on which to serve, along with a Coordinator, who chairs the committee, and these committees are often in need of members.
 - Systems redesign is another program with an Optometry Field Advisory Sub-committee assigned to assist with changes or optometry needs within the program.
 - d. Optometry **Field Advisory Committee (FAC)** or **Field Advisory Sub-Committees**
 - Occasionally a new Sub-Committee will emerge within the FAC, and those committees need able members who are willing to provide ideas, time, and elbow grease in or order to achieve the committee goals. You may wish to volunteer for one of the new sub-committees!
 - e. Tune in to the **Optometry Service Conference Calls** every month, since many volunteer opportunities are mentioned in these calls.
 - f. Get on the **VISN 19 Optometry National** email distribution list by contacting Dr. Gene Grubbs (gene.grubbs@va.gov). *This is an unofficial, voluntary, VA Optometry email list on which many of us are listed. It allows VA ODs to communicate with each other on a broad basis to distribute information, ask questions, and learn about what is affecting VA Optometry. **Updates of this document and others will be distributed over that list as well.** If you have already joined the list, consider advising other VA ODs to join!*

NOTE: Many of the above options take time and planning. You will not walk onto a Council or a Board of Directors anywhere without getting involved and proving your worth first. These options will also take some (or even a great deal) of your free time, and some may require travel.

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!

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

9) How would the requirements for the standards for GS-15 Chief Grade translate into real world requirements?

Chief Grade (GS-15): Meets the requirements for Senior grade and must demonstrate a sustained very high level of professional performance with evidence of exceptional professional and/or administrative development by the following:

- a) Has assumed *substantial professional and/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, the optometrist at this level has had *responsibility 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 development of new and/or revised concepts and programs having *a major impact upon the academic, medical, and optometric communities*.
- b) Outstanding professional attainment. Examples of such attainment are:
 - i) Achievement of outstanding results in research which are regarded as having a major impact on advancing the field.
 - ii) Significant number of noteworthy publications in professional journals.

For part a):

Get involved in optometric programs and organizations, join committees, and make your name known on a national level. This is really the only way to have responsibility for a “major optometric program segment on a nationwide basis”.

Lecturing is wonderful and rewarding and can be very helpful for requesting SAA's, SAP's or working toward promotions below the level of Chief Grade, but the only true way to demonstrate “administrative responsibilities” is to actually participate in an administrative effort within optometry. This could mean being involved in optometry within the VA. It could also involve working within other optometry organizations, *some* of which are outlined [above](#). Be creative, but there really are not many ways to avoid committees or organizations for this standard. The point is to make a concerted effort to affect optometry on a national level.

Someone asked if being a residency program supervisor at a local level fulfilled this requirement.... It can't hurt. Being a residency program supervisor, a clinic supervisor, or a section/service chief offers support to a request to promote to Chief grade, especially at the local level.

For part b):

There is no definition within the standard, and there is nothing written down that specifies how many publications may be considered “noteworthy”. That said, at this time it has been observed that the PSB considers *2 or more significant publications over the course of one's career* to meet the standard (this is one instance in which achievements within previous grade levels may still count toward advancement of grade). The number required to meet the standard is a recent change. Some of us may remember that 3 or more was the “magic number” in the past, but for now, that number has been lowered...good news for many ODs in the VA. This may change in the future, but for now 2 or more seems to be a good thing to aim for.

Notice that the required publications are to be “significant”. That is important and it roughly translates into:

- 1) Publishing in a peer-reviewed journal, or
- 2) Publishing an important, official document, such as a VA directive.

Note: Publishing in a journal that is non-peer reviewed will not contribute to Chief grade. This is not meant to discourage an author of such articles, as these may be useful for SAAs and SAPs, but non-peer reviewed journal articles will not be considered “significant” by the PSB for the purposes of advancement to Chief Grade. The following is a list of approved peer-reviewed journals:



Approved Journals

Another important note: One does not have to be the primary, secondary or even tertiary author of these publications. Any number of authors is acceptable to the PSB.

NOTE: Getting to Chief Grade is not easy, and not all ODs will achieve this quickly. The best way to promote to Chief Grade is to start planning ahead while you are still at the level of Full or Intermediate Grade. It would be unrealistic to expect to be placed in a position of authority or responsibility for a “major optometric program segment on a nationwide basis” without putting several years of effort into the program first. Get involved early and move up within an organization using seniority status.

The same argument may be made for the publications requirement. Publishing often takes time (and revisions), and much of the process will be outside of your control. Start publishing while you are still at the Full or Intermediate Grade level, and you will be able to take your time with your articles.

One more note. When it comes time to actually put in the promotion request for Chief Grade, consider some difficulties that have arisen for others in the past. ([Example Requests Chief Tip](#))

10) I know that we can request step increases when we become a Fellow (FAAO) or take the ACMO, but what other accomplishments warrant a step increase?

The simple answer is: *almost* anything optometry related may be used for step increases.

If it involves promoting optometry within the VA, representing the VA within optometry, or committee work for organized optometry... great!

If it involves a publication or a poster for optometry (or any medical condition)... great!

If it involves working with optometry schools, or supervising students, or optometry residents... great! Just brought on as faculty... great! Student liaison relationship created... great!

ACMO and FAAO are the only *predictable* step increases... we know that the PSB will recommend 3 steps for each. Other stuff is at the discretion of the board. I usually say to put a few small things on one request, but if you have something big (like an article published in a peer-reviewed journal), it can stand alone (consider requesting 3-steps... it can't hurt to ask). If you add a poster and have done recent work on a committee(s), 3 steps would not be an outlandish request, though the PSB may offer less. Almost anything that takes work, effort, and involves optometry goes. See [Example Promotion Requests](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Good Luck!

ADDENDUM A: Table of VISN Mentors

Note: This listing was obtained through the VA Optometry central office and the **VA VISN Optometry Mentors** Page: http://vaww1.va.gov/OPTOMETRY/Administrative_Page.asp (there is a link under the **Administration** section). The **Optometry Service Directory** (linked in the same section) is a great way to find other ODs within your VISN or area.

ADDENDUM B: Other Items of Interest

Incentive Awards: Information for When a Promotion May Not Be Possible

I received an email from a colleague asking about incentive awards, and I had to admit that I knew nothing about them. I tend to concentrate on promotions alone. So I did a little digging...

Sometimes you get to the top of your Grade and Step pretty quickly, and you will have to wait out your time-in-grade at the top (not a bad place to be!). Other times you have reached your full potential as a Chief Grade-Step 10.... What now? Does that mean that your achievements will not be recognized for a few more years or that there are no more goals to achieve? Not necessarily. There are still ways to be recognized for your hard work.

VA FORM 4659: INCENTIVE AWARDS RECOMMENDATION AND APPROVAL (<http://vaww4.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA4659.pdf>)

This is a way for your immediate supervisor to request a cash (or other type of) award for a special achievement on your part. Apparently, there is no limit on the cash request, though requesting a very large amount would be considered a waste of VA resources and time. For a *significant* contribution within the VA, it is not unheard of to request a \$5,000 cash award, though the actual award is usually much less than requested (usually half or less, from what I understand).

What constitutes a significant contribution will be up to you, your supervisor and your local VA facility. It is completely subjective. Since there are no rules or qualification standards for these types of awards, this is a situation where your VISN Mentor probably cannot help you. We may be *One VA*, but each facility has a personality all its own. Like people, each VA approaches these things from a different perspective (and so will each supervisor). You will have to find out what your VA is like in this regard, but it never hurts to try.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

H.R. 2647, Defense Authorization Act 2010: Legal Changes of Interest

http://intelligence.senate.gov/pdfs/military_act_2009.pdf

Subtitle A—General Provision, Section 1901. Credit for Unused Sick Leave (p.426 of 655) states:

SEC. 1901. CREDIT FOR UNUSED SICK LEAVE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 8415 of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating the second subsection (k) and subsection (l) as subsections (l) and (m), respectively; and

(2) in subsection (l) (as so redesignated by paragraph (1))—

(A) by striking “(l) In computing” and inserting “(l)(1) In computing”; and

(B) by adding at the end the following:

“(2)(A) Except as provided in paragraph (1), in computing an annuity under this subchapter, the total service of an employee who retires on an immediate annuity or who dies leaving a survivor or survivors entitled to annuity includes the applicable percentage of the days of unused sick leave to his credit under a formal leave system and for which days the employee has not received payment, except that these days will not be counted in determining average pay or annuity eligibility under this subchapter. For purposes of this subsection, in the case of any such employee who is excepted from subchapter I of chapter 63 under section 6301(2)(x) through (xiii), the days of unused sick leave to his credit include any unused sick leave standing to his credit when he was excepted from such subchapter.

“(B) For purposes of subparagraph (A), the term ‘applicable percentage’ means—

“(i) 50 percent in the case of an annuity, entitlement to which is based on a death or other separation occurring during the period beginning on the date of enactment of this paragraph and ending on December 31, 2013; and

“(ii) 100 percent in the case of an annuity, entitlement to which is based on a death or other separation occurring after December 31, 2013.”.

(b) EXCEPTION FROM DEPOSIT REQUIREMENT.—Section 8422(d)(2) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by striking “section 8415(k)” and inserting “paragraph (1) or (2) of section 8415(l)”.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall apply with respect to any annuity, entitlement to which is based on a death or other separation from service occurring on or after the date of enactment of this Act.

According to the OPM synopsis provided at <http://www.opm.gov/retire/pubs/bals/2010/10-101.pdf>:

Section 1901 – Credit for unused sick leave under FERS

Section 1901 permits unused sick leave to be used as service credit in the computation of benefits under FERS, but not for establishing title to an annuity or in the computation of average salary. Sick leave will be used in the computations in the same manner it is used in CSRS computations. **Effective October 28, 2009, individuals separating with title to an immediate annuity or who die leaving a survivor eligible for a survivor annuity will be entitled to credit for 50 percent of their unused sick leave. Effective for separations and deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2014, 100 percent of the unused sick leave will be available.**

The provisions apply to unused sick leave to the individual's credit under a formal leave system and for which the employee has not received payment. In the case of individuals who have annuities computed under the provisions of both CSRS and FERS, only sick leave not included in the CSRS part of the calculation will be available under FERS. In addition, in the case of an employee who is excepted from subchapter I of chapter 63 under section 6301(2) (x) through (xiii) of title 5, United States Code, (which applies to certain high level officers and employees) the days of unused sick leave include any unused sick leave standing to his or her credit when he or she was excepted from this subchapter.

This provision will greatly affect those of us who rarely call out of work and have built up a great deal of sick leave. It will also remove the incentive to "burn" sick leave before retiring, which is expected to affect productivity in a positive way.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

Subtitle B—Non-Foreign Area Retirement Equity Assurance, Section 1911-1919 (p.430-438 of 655)

This section will not be quoted due to the length of the text, but an OPM synopsis provided by the same link above states:

Section 1911-1919 – Non-foreign area retirement equity assurance

For decades, individuals employed in certain non-foreign areas outside of the contiguous 48 states (Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories or possessions) have been eligible for a non-foreign Cost of Living Allowance (COLA). While such non-foreign COLA payments are not subject to income tax, they are also not basic pay for retirement purposes. Individuals receiving non-foreign COLA payments have not been eligible for locality pay, with the result that their basic pay has fallen further behind the rest-of-US (RUS) locality pay each year.

These provisions permit a phased conversion from non-foreign COLA to locality pay over a three year period beginning in 2010. **Individuals who separate from service from 2010 through 2012 will have the right to elect to have the non-foreign COLA allowances received during that period count towards retirement credit, to the extent that the non-foreign COLA allowances plus any locality pay received do not equal more than the RUS locality pay.** Such election must be filed not later than December 31, 2012. The statute makes provisions for agency and employee payments based upon those elections, which must be made to OPM. OPM will issue regulations to carry out the election and payment process.

This is very good news, as far as the retirement process goes, for those feds working in places like Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico, where in the past, Cost of Living Allowances were offered instead of locality pay. Locality pay is included in any computations of base pay and "high three" for retirement purposes, though it is taxable income. COLAs, while not subject to income tax, also are not included in retirement computations.

There were other changes made by H.R. 2647 in 2010, and the OPM synopsis link above is a great source for understanding those changes, but these two are listed here since they were among the most anticipated changes.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)

ADDENDUM C: Can You “Buy Back” Your VA Residency Year Toward Retirement?

During an optometry residency within the VA, no deductions from the resident’s salary pay are made toward retirement—this is considered to be a **non-deduction** period of civilian federal service.

Some types of non-deduction civilian federal service may be credited toward retirement by making a deposit. A deposit or “buy back” of this type is known as a **Civilian Service Deposit (CSD)**. (There is another type of “buy back” for military service known as a Military Service Deposit (MSD) that applies to those who have served in the military.) Eligible service deposits (CSD or MSD) made by a federal employee allow for prior service to be applied toward that employee’s Retirement Service Computation Date (RSCD) or annuity.

FERS Employees

For employees under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), the deposit consists of payment of the retirement deductions, plus interest, which would have been withheld from one’s salary or pay, if covered by FERS during the period of employment when retirement deductions were not withheld. (This deposit is not a requirement.)

Per OPM.gov (<http://www.opm.gov/retire/pre/fers/index.asp>): Generally, non-deduction service cannot be credited under FERS, unless it was performed before 1989 and a deposit is made.

Deposit for Service Ending before January 1, 1989 and Covered by FERS: You can make a deposit for creditable Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) service you performed before 1989 during which retirement deductions were not withheld from your pay. Interest is charged from the midpoint of periods of service and is compounded annually. Interest is charged to the date the deposit is paid in full or the annuity begins, whichever is earlier. If you do not pay for a period of this type of service, you will not receive credit in determining your eligibility to retire or in computing your retirement benefit.

Deposit for Service Ending on/after January 1, 1989 and Covered by FERS: With certain minor exceptions, a Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) employee cannot make a deposit for non-contributory service performed on/after January 1, 1989. The exceptions:

- U.S. Senate Child Care Center service
- Peace Corps/VISTA service
- service under the Foreign Service Pension System (FSPS)
- service performed before 12/31/90 with the Democratic or Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee or the Democratic or Republican National Congressional Committee
- service with the Library of Congress Child Development Center prior to 12/21/00

None of these exceptions apply to an optometry residency at the VA.

What does this mean for VA optometrists under FERS?

- 1) If you did a VA residency **before** January 1, 1989, and you wish to “buy back” your residency year to affect your retirement calculations, you should contact your local Human Resources Rep to get the ball rolling. You will have to fill out paperwork that HR will help you attain, and then your request will be sent to OPM in order to calculate what you owe for the deposit. Expect the OPM process to take about 6 months or so.

For those who are concerned about the cost, you will not have to commit to paying your CSD until you see how much you owe, and it may cost less than you expect. One VA OD completed his residency in 1985, and then applied to OPM to make a CSD in 2005. His deposit was around \$700 or so... not much compared to the benefits of retiring a little earlier, especially considering an ultimate “high three” salary rate.

- 2) If you did a VA residency **after** January 1, 1989, you do not have the option of “buying back” your residency year.

CSRS Employees

For employees under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), the deposit consists of payment of the retirement deductions, plus interest, which would have been withheld from one’s salary or pay, if covered by CSRS during the period of employment when retirement deductions were not withheld. (This deposit is not a requirement.)

Per OPM.gov (<http://www.opm.gov/retire/pre/csrs/index.asp>), a deposit may be made for non-deduction service as follows:

Deposit for Service Ending before October 1, 1982 and Covered by CSRS: You can make a deposit for creditable Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) service you performed before October 1982 during which retirement deductions were not withheld from your pay. You will receive retirement credit for all of this service whether or not you pay the deposit. However, unless you pay the deposit in full, your annual benefit will be reduced by 10 percent of the *deposit amount* due at retirement. Also, any annuity due your surviving spouse will be reduced proportionately. Interest is charged from the midpoint of periods of service through the date of the bill. If full payment is received within 30 days after the bill is issued, no additional interest is charged. Otherwise, interest will be computed after each payment at the rate of 3 percent for the interval since the most recent payment you have made. You may pay installments of \$50 or more, but paying the full amount minimizes further interest charges. After each payment we will send you an updated account statement.

Deposit for Service Ending on/after October 1, 1982 and Covered by CSRS: You can make a deposit for creditable Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) service you performed on or after October 1982 during which retirement deductions were not withheld from your pay. Unless you pay the deposit in full, you will not receive credit for the service in the computation of your annuity. Interest is charged from the midpoint of periods of service and is compounded annually. Interest is charged through December 31 of the year before the year in which the bill is being issued. If full payment is received by December 31 of the year in which the bill is issued, no additional interest will be charged. If not, interest will be computed once each year as of December 31 based on the unpaid balance at that time. Interest is applied at the rates described in the table below.

What does this mean for VA optometrists under CSRS?

- 1) If you did a VA residency **before** October 1, 1982, you do not *have* to “buy back” your residency year to receive retirement credit for your residency year. If you choose *not* to make a Civilian Service Deposit (CSD), your annual retirement benefit will be reduced by 10% of the **deposit amount** due at retirement, and you will not receive the full annuity to which you are entitled.
- 2) If you did a VA residency **after** October 1, 1982, you will have to make a CSD in order to receive any credit for your residency year toward the computation of your annual annuity.

You will have to fill out paperwork that HR will help you attain, and then your request will be sent to OPM in order to calculate what you owe for the deposit. Expect the OPM process to take about 6 months or so. For those who are concerned about the cost, you will not have to commit to paying your CSD until you see how much you owe, and it may cost less than you expect.

[Table of Contents](#)

[References](#)