



WESTERN REGION TECHNICAL ATTACHMENT
NO. 87-07
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON MET TECH CROSSOVER TRAINING

The attached technical attachment was prepared by Southern Region to answer several questions of particular concern to met techs attempting to become educationally qualified for meteorologist positions. Although not all questions and answers apply to Western Region employees, most do and that is why they are being reprinted here. Specifically, some of the points that do not apply in our region are discussed below.

In the answer to question 1, it states that a list of commonly taken courses, including what courses count for what credits, was provided to all employees. It was not distributed in our region because it never received approval from NWSH and also because WASC felt it could not apply some of the guidelines on course redundancy. It is available from SSD for anyone who wants it.

The Southern Region "Guide to Continuing Education" discussed in the answer to question 6 was also distributed to all Western Region field sites.

Regarding the answer to question 9, we do not have a set policy on how many concurrent courses the region will pay for. We will consider requests for multiple courses. Whether they will be approved will depend on availability of funds, merits of the request, etc.

Western Region does not keep a Training Records Data Base referred to in question 10.

Technical AttachmentQuestions We've Been Asked Recently Concerning Training

Scientific Services Division, SRH

1. I'm interested in converting to a meteorologist. When I call SRH with a question they tell me to talk to MASC. When I call MASC, they tell me to talk to SRH! Who's in charge anyway?!

Ans. That sounds like a simple question and it should have a simple answer. Unfortunately, it doesn't. The reason is there are many aspects to the conversion issue. We would like to address some of these aspects, but there are many, so bear with us.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) specifies educational requirements for the meteorologist (1340) job series, but the specification is rather general. For instance, "one year" of physics is called for. Does that mean calculus-based physics, or does it mean what is usually referred to as "physics for non-majors", i.e., physics without a calculus prerequisite? Is "one year" six semester hours? Six hours of "weather analysis and forecasting" is called for. Can the same course be repeated twice?

The OPM requirements have to be interpreted, and this has historically been the job of training specialists in NWS Personnel. That function was transferred to the ASCs...in our case, MASC (Boulder). MASC Personnel Specialists do not have years of experience dealing with this issue and they lack familiarity with various meteorology courses. At the same time, the fact that NWS employees are served by four different ASCs requires that every effort be made to apply the same interpretation criteria. The result of all this is confusion about "what counts for what" in terms of courses employees may have taken, or contemplate taking.

The NWS Regions (SSDs) got together a couple of years ago and developed guidance for the ASCs (and employees) in the form of a list of commonly taken courses, indicating how the courses had always had been accredited when NWS personnelists reviewed employees' records. The list also addressed such things as what comprises six hours of "weather analysis and forecasting" and redundancy of courses. The list was provided to employees, through supervisors, and to the ASCs. Whether the list is being universally applied is not certain. Whether the SSDs have the authority to draw up such a list in the first place (i.e., interpret OPM regulations) is equally uncertain! Nevertheless, such a list provides a good starting place for standardization.

SSD is frequently asked to provide guidance with regard to coursework. We are happy to do so and try to be consistent with past practice in such guidance. MASC, however, has the authority to determine whether or not an employee has satisfied OPM requirements. When discussing this subject with employees we try to make the distinction clear. Although MASC and SSD consult with each other frequently, our interpretations do not always agree.

2. OK, fine. Since you mentioned it, do I need calculus-based physics or not?

Ans. OPM does not require this. As far as we know the ASCs have been consistent in this interpretation of the regulations. The real issue, however, is whether an employee is interested in merely satisfying OPM, or in obtaining an education which will serve him or her well in the future. Most meteorology degree programs require calculus-based physics as a pre- or corequisite. The reason is not pedantic. It's because the science of meteorology is an extension of the other disciplines.

3. If OPM doesn't require it, why did the NWS make it a requirement for the San Jose course?

Ans. The NWS didn't, San Jose State did. They are providing the course for the NWS, but they are maintaining the same standards (prerequisites) that they require for all students. This is not unreasonable from the university's standpoint. The goal is quality university education.

4. But San Jose probably cut out a lot of met techs who have satisfied OPM requirements except for meteorology...why didn't the NWS contract with a university that had less stringent requirements?

Ans. San Jose will be an experiment for the NWS. It will cost several thousand dollars each for the 18 students who participate. The future NWS will demand the best meteorologists we can find -- or train. For both of these reasons it does not make sense to invest in lower quality education.

5. If I missed out on San Jose this time, will I get another chance?

Ans. We hope so. Weather Service Headquarters has indicated they would like to make this a continuing program, as long as it serves our needs. Of course, that depends on whether the initial experiment is successful.

6. Are there any other options?

Ans. Calculus and physics courses are available by correspondence from many schools. Southern Region's "Guide to Continuing Education", distributed several years ago, contains lists of these. Even better are courses offered at local universities and community colleges. Meteorology courses by correspondence are scarce, although the "Guide" shows some sources. NWSH has indicated they want to help more universities develop correspondence courses in meteorology. Until more courses are available by correspondence the only other option is in-residence. The 20/20 and full-time university assignment programs still exist. San Jose is just a special case of these. Interested employees should look out for semi-annual scholarship announcements. A "call" will be made very soon for applications for the fall '87 - spring '88 school year. We frequently use the SR Administrative Notes and station memos to call attention to opportunities. SSD can always be contacted for more information.

7. Since you mentioned correspondence courses, what's the deal with USDA courses...do they count or not?

Ans. The American Council on Education (ACE) generally does not recommend accreditation of USDA courses by universities. Even so, OPM accepts USDA credits on the same basis as those of accredited institutions for purposes of qualifying for Federal jobs. In other words, the USDA courses do "count". The catch is, as discussed earlier, employees who go that route might discover later on that the coursework they've taken does not adequately prepare them for future opportunities such as the San Jose State course.

Even more important, the question which should be asked is, "Why am I taking this course?" Is it simply to satisfy an OPM requirement, or is it because you expect to learn something which will help you do your job better? In the case of those who are working toward crossover, another important question is, "What do I have to do to best prepare myself to compete successfully in the future?" Meeting minimum educational requirements, by whatever means, does not guarantee career progression.

8. I understand the Southern Region will not pay for the USDA Dynamic Meteorology courses, but are they even available anymore? I heard they were discontinued.

Ans. The USDA withdrew the courses a year or so ago pending revision. They've indicated the new courses are now ready and NWS has been asked to review them. We've heard nothing more from USDA. When the courses will be reviewed and what the outcome will be are unknown. Incidentally, it is our understanding the USDA synoptic course(s) are also about ready.

9. I want to take calculus and physics at the same time at the local college and I submitted training requests (SF-182s) to SRH. I was told I could only take one course at a time. That's not helping me finish my courses very fast! What's the deal?

Ans. You may take as many courses as you can at the same time. Regional policy has been to pay for only one course at a time. This helps us stretch training funds a little farther. Such policies are subject to change, however. Employees should realize there is no training budget, per se. The NWS also has no responsibility to pay for any non-agency required training. We have always done so, however, to the extent possible in the interest of employee career development. It's not unreasonable to expect employees to share the cost.

10. I've been sending grade certificates and other such stuff to SRH, but I have not been able to get an updated summary of my training. What happened to the Training Records Database SSD was supposed to be keeping?

Ans. Because of computer changes (partly) and personnel turnover (mostly) the database is inaccessible. It still exists, and we're saving records which we receive, but when we will be able to reactivate the file is uncertain. Just as a reminder, the database is not "official" in any case. It was designed to provide managers (and employees) with ready access to training information for planning purposes. Official training files are kept by MASC.