

Analyze This: Computer Disqualifying Provisionals

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, March 23, 2015 5:00 pm

As thousands of city analysts prepare to take civil-service exams, hundreds of provisionals may have been disqualified from signing up for the tests because of simple errors, the head of the union representing city analysts said.

As part of a plan to reduce the city's provisionals, thousands of workers in analyst-related titles—including Administrative Staff Analysts, Education Officers, Associate Staff Analysts, and Education Analysts—need to take exams administered by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services in order to protect their jobs.



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ROBERT J. CROGHAN: A counterproductive system.

Seven Exams Scheduled

There are at least seven open-competitive and promotional exams scheduled by DCAS. Their filing periods were last month and test dates have been scheduled for May and June.

More than 2,900 employees in analyst-related titles were provisionals as of Oct. 31, according to DCAS.

The exams are being administered to reduce the number of provisionals working without civil-service protections, following the 2007 Long Beach decision by the State Court of Appeals that limits provisional appointments to nine months. The following year, the Bloomberg administration developed a plan to reduce them, which the state Civil Service Commission subsequently agreed to extend through next year. DCAS planned to address 2,486 Administrative Staff Analyst provisionals by the end of June, according to the plan it submitted last September.

The city employs 21,454 provisionals, DCAS officials said last month.

A 'Gotcha' Process

But Organization of Staff Analysts Chairperson Robert J. Croghan said some candidates have been disqualified for procedural errors and barred from taking the exams. Many of the issues arose because new computer-based tests have tripped up some members. If they enter work experience in the wrong category, for example, they can't go back to the page and instead have to appeal the automatic disqualification.

"If you go to the computer and you file and the computer rules that you did it wrong, you are not permitted to take the exam again, you're only permitted to appeal," he said.

The OSA helped more than 1,000 people file for the tests over the last month and is coaching them to

provide their education and experience requirements and train for the exams.

“The promotional filing is pretty simple and you’re not likely to make a mistake of any sort, but the open-competitive one is much more likely to create problems for people,” Mr. Croghan said.

Maybe Hundreds DQed?

He didn’t know how many were disqualified by the computer before taking the tests, but said that dozens have approached him and estimated the total numbered in the hundreds. DCAS could not immediately provide numbers of how many signed up for the exams, or how many had been disqualified; the Civil Service Commission referred the question to the Mayor’s Office, which didn’t immediately comment.

“There’s no question it’s caused a whole bunch of people to be disqualified [whom] they don’t even want to be disqualified,” Mr. Croghan said. “It’s kind of awkward.”

Analysts, according to the OSA website, “break complex matters down into their component parts to enable greater understanding” but their jobs are generally flexible across the dozens of agencies where they are employed.

OSA represents many of the affected workers, but the United Federation of Teachers represents some, including approximately 210 Education Officers. Last November, the UFT warned its members that they would have to obtain permanent status.

Take It or Lose It

“If you don’t take the exam, you will lose the chance to have your name placed on the civil-service list that will be created based on the exam,” staff directors wrote. “If you do not take and pass the exam, you risk losing your position as an Education Officer or Associate Education Officer.”