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U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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FEB 26 2004

FILE: LIN 02 260 51456 Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER Date:

IN RE: Petitioner: [Redacted]
Beneficiary: [Redacted]

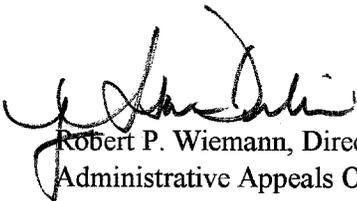
PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the
Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.


Robert P. Wiemann, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The service center director denied the nonimmigrant visa petition and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed. The petition will be denied.

The petitioner is a hapkido school that seeks to employ the beneficiary as a physical education instructor. The petitioner endeavors to classify the beneficiary as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101 (a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

The director denied the petition because the proffered position is not a specialty occupation. On appeal, counsel submits a brief and copies of previously submitted documentation.

Section 214(i)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1184 (i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and
- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, the position must meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;
- (2) The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or
- (4) The nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proffered position.

The record of proceeding before the AAO contains: (1) Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for additional evidence; (3) the petitioner's response to the director's request; (4) the director's denial letter; and (5) Form I-290B and supporting documentation. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

The petitioner is seeking the beneficiary's services as a physical education instructor. Evidence of the beneficiary's duties includes: the I-129 petition and the petitioner's response to the director's request for

evidence. According to this evidence, the beneficiary would perform duties that entail providing martial arts instruction and supervising and training student teachers. The petitioner indicated that a qualified candidate for the job would possess a bachelor's degree in martial arts/physical education.

The director found that the proffered position was not a specialty occupation. Citing to the Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)*, 2002-2003 edition, the director noted that the minimum requirement for entry into the position of a sports instructor was not a baccalaureate degree or its equivalent in a specific specialty. The director found further that the petitioner failed to establish any of the criteria found at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

On appeal, counsel states that the petitioner's other employees have bachelor's degrees in physical education. Counsel submits copies of H1B petition approvals and documentation for four individuals. Counsel contends that this fulfills the third criterion listed above, and that the proffered position should consequently be considered a specialty occupation.

Apart from the analysis required by 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3), it must be noted that each nonimmigrant petition is a separate proceeding with a separate record, and each must be given unique consideration. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.8(d). In making a determination of statutory eligibility, Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) is limited to the information contained in the record of proceeding. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(16)(ii). If the prior petitions were approved based on evidence that was substantially similar to the evidence contained in this record of proceeding, the approval of the prior petitions would have been erroneous. CIS is not required to approve petitions where eligibility has not been demonstrated, merely because of prior approvals that may have been erroneous. *See, e.g., Matter of Church Scientology International*, 19 I&N Dec. 593, 597 (Comm. 1988). Neither CIS nor any other agency must treat acknowledged errors as binding precedent. *Sussex Engg. Ltd. v. Montgomery* 825 F.2d 1084, 1090 (6th Cir. 1987), *cert denied*, 485 U.S. 1008 (1988).

The AAO now turns to counsel's assertion that the petitioner has established that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation through evidence of the petitioner's past hiring practices. While this evidence falls within the regulatory parameters detailed above, it is important to remember that because regulations are only an agency's interpretation of the statute, it is the statutory definition of specialty occupation that takes precedence. The four criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) present certain ambiguities when compared to the statutory definition, and "might also be read as merely an additional requirement that a position must meet, in addition to the statutory and regulatory definition." *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F. 3d 384 (5th Cir. 2000).

Thus, although the petitioner presents evidence meeting the regulatory criterion that it has hired several degreed individuals in the past, it must also show that the degree requirement is not an arbitrary, self-imposed standard, and that the position requires, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent. As noted by the director in his denial, the evidence does not establish that the proffered position involves the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, or that attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty, or its equivalent, is the minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The petitioner has failed to establish that the proffered position meets the statutory definition of a specialty occupation. Accordingly, the AAO shall not disturb the director's denial of the petition.

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The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not sustained that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed. The petition is denied.