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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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Washington, DC 20529



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services



FILE: LIN 04 023 52657 Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER

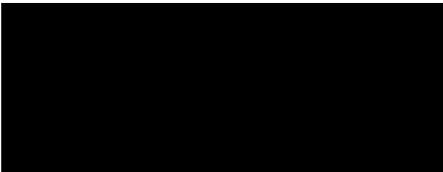
NOV 20 2004

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:



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

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prevent clearly unwarranted
invasion of personal privacy

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 wholesale travel company that seeks to employ the beneficiary as a tourism manager. 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 does not qualify as a specialty occupation, and because the beneficiary is not qualified to perform the duties of a specialty occupation. On appeal, the petitioner submits a brief and additional information stating that the offered position qualifies as a specialty occupation and that the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of a specialty occupation.

The first issue to be discussed in this proceeding is whether the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation.

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), provides, in part, for the classification of qualified nonimmigrant aliens who are coming temporarily to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation.

Section 214(i)(1) of 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.

The term "specialty occupation" is further defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as:

[A]n occupation which requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a 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 are 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) the 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) the Form I-290B with supporting documentation. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

The petitioner is seeking the beneficiary’s services as a tourism manager. Evidence of the beneficiary’s duties includes the Form I-129 petition with attachment, the petitioner’s response to the director’s request for evidence, and its appeal. According to this evidence the beneficiary would: (15 percent of the time) research local and national trends in travel; (15 percent of the time) research pricing and identify customer needs through printed publications and the Internet; contact local national and international retail outlets to research marketing of travel products; (10 percent of the time) direct the contract website manager regarding web development and content; manage content to attract retail clients and fulfill the company marketing plan; (5 percent of the time) meet with the owner and staff to develop and implement the company marketing plan; (5 percent of the time) direct the content of the monthly E-marketing newsletter and oversee content development in order to increase business and effectively market company products; (20 percent of the time) develop and implement tour concepts; (10 percent of the time) develop an effective sales strategy to sell wholesale travel products to retail interests; (10 percent of the time) communicate with possible tour sites to effectively develop tour plans and marketing strategies; (10 percent of the time) conduct financial analysis of tour products in order to arrive at effective and profitable pricing strategies and report to the owner the results of the analysis; and (10 percent of the time) meet with the owner and staff to direct and implement the management strategy of the company. (the time percentages noted above exceed 100 percent, but are the actual time percentages noted by the petitioner). The petitioner requires a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in business for tourism or marketing for entry into the offered position.

Upon review of the record, the petitioner has failed to establish that a baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the offered position, or that a degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations, as asserted by the petitioner. Factors often considered by CIS when determining these criteria include: whether the Department of Labor’s *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)* reports that the industry requires a degree; whether an industry professional association has made a degree a minimum entry requirement; and whether letters or affidavits from firms or individuals in the industry attest that such firms “routinely employ and recruit only degreed individuals.” See *Shanti, Inc. v. Reno*, 36 F. Supp. 2d 1151, 1165 (D. Min. 1999) (quoting *Hird/Baker Corp. v. Slattery*, 764 F. Supp. 872, 1102 (S.D.N.Y. 1991)).

- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or
- (4) The nature of the specific duties are so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

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The AAO routinely consults the *Handbook* for information about the duties and educational requirements of particular occupations. The duties of the proffered position fall within those noted for advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers, not travel agents, as determined by the director, or a market research analyst as stated by the petitioner. The *Handbook* notes that a wide range of educational backgrounds is suitable for entry into the aforementioned positions, but that many employers prefer related experience plus a broad liberal arts background. Bachelor's degrees in sociology, psychology, literature, journalism, philosophy, or other subjects are suitable. Requirements will vary, however, depending on the duties of a particular position. For example, some employers prefer a bachelor's or master's degree in business administration with an emphasis in marketing, for marketing, sales, and promotion management positions. In highly technical industries such as computer and electronics manufacturing a degree in engineering or science combined with a business degree may be preferred. In public relations management positions some employers prefer a bachelor's or master's degree in public relations or journalism. The *Handbook* further notes that most advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales management positions are filled by promoting experienced staff or related professional or technical personnel. Many managers are former sales representatives, purchasing agents, or promotions specialists. A baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is not, therefore, the minimum requirement for entry into the position. A degree in a wide range of disciplines will suffice. The petitioner has, accordingly, failed to establish the first criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

The petitioner also makes reference to the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)* SVP rating for the offered position and contends that the rating establishes that the position requires at least a bachelor's degree. The petitioner's assertions regarding the *DOT*'s SVP rating are unpersuasive. An SVP rating is meant to indicate only the total number of years of vocational preparation required for a particular position. The SVP classification does not describe how those years are to be divided among training, formal education, and experience, nor does it specify the particular type of degree, if any, that a position would require.

The petitioner has also failed to establish that a degree requirement, in a specific specialty, is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). In support of this assertion the petitioner submitted statements from several competitors similar in size and nature to the petitioner's business. All of the competitors indicated that a baccalaureate level education was required for their marketing/sales and management positions. Two indicated that a degree in tourism was advantageous or preferred, and one said that it required a degree in tourism. The others simply indicated that a bachelor's degree in an unspecified discipline would suffice. The statements tendered, however, did not provide any information indicating how many degreed employees were employed in those capacities or provide degree documentation substantiating the employment of degree holders. Simply going on the record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for the purpose of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. See *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972). The statements presented are, therefore, of little evidentiary value as they do not establish the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). The petitioner also submitted a copy of a job advertisement from Resort Condominiums International, LLC (RCI) for a sales/account executive, and copies of eight advertisements from Travel Distribution Services for a market manager position in eight different locations throughout the United States. The advertisement from RCI does not indicate that a bachelor's degree is required for the position, but prefers a degree in business, travel, or hospitality. The remaining eight advertisements require a bachelor's degree but do not indicate that the degree must be in any particular specialty. This is consistent

with the statement in the *Handbook* which notes that degrees in a wide range of disciplines will qualify individuals for entry into similar positions. The advertisements submitted also fail to establish the criterion of the above cited regulation.

The petitioner indicates that it normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the proffered position. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3). In support of this proposition the petitioner submitted copies of diplomas from two other employees who held/hold the same or similar positions to that of the offered position. One individual holds a bachelor's degree in business or tourism from Southern Cross University in Australia (the same degree held by the beneficiary), but no equivalency evaluation is submitted to establish that the degree is equivalent to a bachelor's degree in the United States. It is noted, however, that the beneficiary's degree is deemed to be equivalent to three years of study toward a bachelor's degree in business administration in travel/tourism management. The other degree is a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Colorado in an unspecified discipline held by an individual presently working in reservations and accounting who previously held the position of manager. The petitioner also states that an employee working in advertising and sales holds a bachelor's degree in marketing and advertising, but provides no documentary proof of that degree. The documentation submitted does not establish the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3). Further, CIS must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *Cf. Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F. 3d 384 (5th Cir. 2000). The critical element is not the title of the position or an employer's self-imposed standards, but whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation as required by the Act.¹ To interpret the regulations any other way would lead to absurd results: if CIS were limited to reviewing a petitioner's self-imposed employment requirements, then any alien with a bachelor's degree could be brought into the United States to perform menial, non-professional, or an otherwise non-specialty occupation, so long as the employer required all such employees to have baccalaureate or higher degrees. *See id* at 388.

The duties to be performed by the beneficiary are not so specialized or complex that knowledge required to perform them is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty. Nor are the duties so complex or unique that they can be performed only by an individual with a degree in a specific specialty. The duties are routine for the position in the industry. The petitioner has, therefore, failed to establish the criteria at 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2) or (4).

Finally the petitioner asserts that the position should be recognized as a specialty occupation because previous decisions for similar positions have been approved by CIS in the past. This reference will not sustain the petitioner's burden of establishing H-1B qualification in the petition now before the AAO. This record of proceeding does not contain the entire record of proceedings in the petitions referred to by counsel. Accordingly, no comparison of the positions can be made. Each nonimmigrant petition is a separate proceeding with a separate record. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.8(d). In making a determination of statutory

¹ The court in *Defensor v. Meissner* observed that 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." *See id.* at 387.

eligibility, the AAO is limited to the information contained in the record of proceeding. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(16)(ii). It warrants noting that Congress intended this visa classification for aliens that are to be employed in an occupation that requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge. Congress specifically stated that such an occupation would require, as a *minimum* qualification, a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specialty. CIS regularly approves H-1B petitions for qualified aliens who are to be employed as engineers, computer scientists, certified public accountants, college professors, and other such professions. These occupations all require a baccalaureate degree in the specialty occupation as a minimum for entry into the occupation and fairly represent the types of professions that Congress contemplated when it created that visa category. In the present matter, the petitioner has offered the beneficiary a position as a tourism manager. For the reasons discussed above, the proffered position does not require attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty as a minimum for entry into the occupation, and approval of a petition for another beneficiary based on identical facts would constitute material error, gross error, and a violation of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2 paragraph (h).

The final issue to be considered is whether the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of a specialty occupation.

Section 214(i)(2) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(2), states that an alien applying for classification as an H-1B nonimmigrant worker must possess:

- (A) full state licensure to practice in the occupation, if such licensure is required to practice in the occupation,
- (B) completion of the degree described in paragraph (1)(B) for the occupation, or
- (C) (i) experience in the specialty equivalent to the completion of such degree, and
(ii) recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions relating to the specialty.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C), to qualify to perform services in a specialty occupation, the alien must meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) Hold a United States baccalaureate or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university;
- (2) Hold a foreign degree determined to be equivalent to a United States baccalaureate or higher degree required by the specialty occupation from an accredited college or university;
- (3) Hold an unrestricted State license, registration or certification which authorizes him or her to fully practice the specialty occupation and be immediately engaged in that specialty in the state of intended employment; or
- (4) Have education, specialized training, and/or progressively responsible experience that is

equivalent to completion of a United States baccalaureate or higher degree in the specialty occupation, and have recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions directly related to the specialty.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D), for purposes of paragraph (h)(4)(iii)(C)(4) of this section, equivalence to completion of a United States baccalaureate or higher degree shall mean achievement of a level of knowledge, competence, and practice in the specialty occupation that has been determined to be equal to that of an individual who has a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specialty and shall be determined by one or more of the following:

- (1) An evaluation from an official who has authority to grant college-level credit for training and/or experience in the specialty at an accredited college or university which has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience;
- (2) The results of recognized college-level equivalency examinations or special credit programs, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), or Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI);
- (3) An evaluation of education by a reliable credentials evaluation service which specializes in evaluating foreign educational credentials;
- (4) Evidence of certification or registration from a nationally-recognized professional association or society for the specialty that is known to grant certification or registration to persons in the occupational specialty who have achieved a certain level of competence in the specialty;
- (5) A determination by the Service that the equivalent of the degree required by the specialty occupation has been acquired through a combination of education, specialized training, and/or work experience in areas related to the specialty and that the alien has achieved recognition of expertise in the specialty occupation as a result of such training and experience.

The petitioner seeks to qualify the beneficiary by establishing that the beneficiary meets the requirements of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(4). In support of this assertion, the petitioner submitted an evaluation from [REDACTED] president of Foreign Credential Evaluations, Inc. [REDACTED] opined that the beneficiary's foreign education was equivalent to three years of study transferable toward a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Travel-Tourism Management in the United States. That education, coupled with one additional semester of study at the University of Wisconsin and one and one-half years of work related experience, was deemed by Ms. Cotter to be equivalent to a Bachelor of Business Administration in Travel-Tourism Management in the United States. [REDACTED] issued her experiential evaluation on behalf of a credentials evaluation service. Those services may only issue equivalency evaluations of an individual's foreign education, not past work experience. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(3). A beneficiary's past work experience may be evaluated by an official who has authority to grant college-level credit for training and/or experience in the specialty at an accredited college or university which has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience. 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1). In this instance, the record does not establish that [REDACTED] has the required authority to evaluate the beneficiary's past work

experience. To comply with this regulatory criterion, the record must establish that the evaluation is from an individual employed by a university which has a program for granting the requisite credit in the particular specialty. The record must also contain a statement from the university that the evaluator has authority, at that university, to grant the requisite credit in the subject specialty. The record does not establish that the evaluator satisfies either of these criteria. The portion of the evaluation analyzing the beneficiary's work experience is, therefore, of little evidentiary value and the petitioner has not established the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of a specialty occupation pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(4).

Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), may itself determine whether the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of the specialty occupation. That determination may be made pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2 (h)(4)(iii)(D)(5), which provides:

For purposes of determining equivalency to a baccalaureate degree in the specialty, three years of specialized training and/or work experience must be demonstrated for each year of college-level training the alien lacks. For equivalence to an advanced (or Masters) degree, the alien must have a baccalaureate degree followed by at least five years of experience in the specialty. . . . It must be clearly demonstrated that the alien's training and/or work experience included the theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge required by the specialty occupation; that the alien's experience was gained while working with peers, supervisors, or subordinates who have a degree or its equivalent in the specialty occupation; and that the alien has recognition of expertise in the specialty evidenced by at least one type of documentation such as:

- (i) Recognition of expertise in the specialty occupation by at least two recognized authorities in the same specialty occupation;
- (ii) Membership in a recognized foreign or United States association or society in the specialty occupation;
- (iii) Published material by or about the alien in professional publications, trade journals, books or major newspapers;
- (iv) Licensure or registration to practice the specialty occupation in a foreign country;
or
- (v) Achievements which a recognized authority has determined to be significant contributions to the field of the specialty occupation.

The documentation recounting the beneficiary's work experience lacks sufficient detail to establish that her training and/or work experience included the theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge required by the specialty occupation; that her experience was gained while working with peers, supervisors, or subordinates who have a degree or its equivalent in the specialty occupation; and that she has recognition of expertise in the specialty. CIS cannot, therefore, determine that the beneficiary is qualified to perform the duties of the specialty occupation.

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Page 9

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 failed to sustain that burden and the appeal shall accordingly be dismissed.

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