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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of Administrative Appeals, MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
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[REDACTED]

FILE: [REDACTED] Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER Date: OCT 26 2010

IN RE: Petitioner: [REDACTED]
Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Member of the Professions Holding an Advanced Degree or an Alien of Exceptional Ability Pursuant to Section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:
[REDACTED]

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied by us in reaching our decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. The specific requirements for filing such a request can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$585. Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires that any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you

Perry Khew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

professional under the third classification or to have experience equating to an advanced degree under the second, *an alien must have at least a bachelor's degree.*

56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991) (emphasis added).

There is no provision in the statute or the regulations that would allow a beneficiary to qualify under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree with anything less than a full baccalaureate degree. More specifically, an advanced degree in an unrelated field combined with five years of experience in a relevant field will not be considered to be the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. at 245. Where the analysis of the beneficiary's credentials relies on work experience alone or a combination of multiple lesser degrees, the result is the "equivalent" of a bachelor's degree rather than a "foreign equivalent degree."⁴ In order to have experience and education equating to an advanced degree under section 203(b)(2) of the Act, the beneficiary must have a single degree that is the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). As explained in the preamble to the final rule, persons who claim to qualify for an immigrant visa by virtue of education or experience equating to a bachelor's degree may qualify for a visa pursuant to section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Act as a skilled worker with more than two years of training and experience. 56 Fed. Reg. at 60900.

For this classification, advanced degree professional, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(i)(B) requires the submission of an "official academic record showing that the alien has a United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree." For classification as a member of the professions, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(C) requires the submission of "an official college or university record showing the date the baccalaureate degree was awarded and the area of concentration of study." We cannot conclude that the evidence required to demonstrate that an alien is an advanced degree professional is any less than the evidence required to show that the alien is a professional. To do so would undermine the congressionally mandated classification scheme by allowing a lesser evidentiary standard for the more restrictive visa classification. Moreover, the commentary accompanying the proposed advanced degree professional regulation specifically states that a "baccalaureate means a bachelor's degree received *from a college or university*, or an equivalent degree." (Emphasis added.) 56 Fed. Reg. 30703, 30306 (July 5, 1991). *Cf.* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(ii)(A) (relating to aliens of exceptional ability requiring the submission of "an official academic record showing that the alien has a degree, *diploma, certificate or similar award* from a college, university, *school or other institution of learning* relating to the area of exceptional ability"). In the instant matter, the beneficiary possesses a post secondary degree six years in length that is equal to or greater than a baccalaureate degree from a U.S. college or university.

⁴ Compare 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5) (defining for purposes of a nonimmigrant visa classification, the "equivalence to completion of a college degree" as including, in certain cases, a specific combination of education and experience). The regulations pertaining to the immigrant classification sought in this matter do not contain similar language.

With the I-140 petition, the petitioner submitted three evaluation reports. The first report entitled "Educational Evaluation Report" is written by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in his report, [REDACTED] states that based on the addendum to the beneficiary's diploma issued by the Russian State Medical University on [REDACTED] the beneficiary's education in Russia is the equivalent of the U.S. Degree of Doctor of Medicine awarded by a U.S. regionally accredited college or university. The second report, entitled "Professional Work Experience Evaluation Report," is dated [REDACTED] and written by [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] states that the beneficiary's education and over five years of responsible professional work experience in the field of information technology are equivalent to a U.S. Master's degree of Information Technology awarded by a U.S. regionally accredited college or university.

The third document contained in the record is a Hebrew language certificate with English translation dated [REDACTED] written by [REDACTED] from the Ministry of Education and Culture, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. This certificate states that the beneficiary's diploma from the Russian State Medical University is equivalent to a second academic (master) degree among the academic degrees accepted in [REDACTED]. Since this third document does not establish any educational equivalency to a U.S. master's or bachelor's degree, the AAO will not discuss this document further in these proceedings as it has no probative value.

The AAO notes that the [REDACTED] valuations examine distinct parts of the beneficiary's curriculum vitae. The first report examines the beneficiary's medical degree, while the second combines his medical degree and work experience to determine that the beneficiary has the equivalent of a U.S. master's degree in information technology.

In determining the equivalency between the beneficiary's medical degree and U.S. higher education, we have reviewed the Electronic Database for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and Admissions Officer [REDACTED], according to its website, [REDACTED] is "a nonprofit, voluntary, professional association of more than 10,000 higher education admissions and registration professionals who represent approximately 2,500 institutions in more than 30 countries." Its mission "is to provide professional development, guidelines and voluntary standards to be used by higher education officials regarding the best practices in records management, admissions, enrollment management, administrative information technology and student services." According to the registration page for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is "a web-based resource for the evaluation of foreign educational credentials."

With regard to the post secondary education system in Russia, [REDACTED] notes that the *Diplom spetsialista* in architecture, law, or medicine (six years) represents attainment of a level of education comparable to a first professional degree in architecture, law, or medicine in the United States. The *Diplom spetsialista* in other fields (five years) represents attainment of a level of education comparable to a master's degree in the United States. Thus, the AAO would determine the

beneficiary's medical degree (based on twelve semesters of studies and a state medical examination) to be the equivalent of a medical degree in the United States and an advanced degree for purposes of the EB2 advanced professional visa preference classification.

Because the beneficiary does have a specialized advanced degree that is equivalent to an "United States advanced degree," the beneficiary does qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as she does have the minimum level of education required by the certified ETA 9089.

Qualifications for the Job Offered

Relying in part on *Madany*, 696 F.2d at 1008, the U.S. Federal Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (Ninth Circuit) stated:

[I]t appears that the DOL is responsible only for determining the availability of suitable American workers for a job and the impact of alien employment upon the domestic labor market. It does not appear that the DOL's role extends to determining if the alien is qualified for the job for which he seeks sixth preference status. That determination appears to be delegated to the INS under section 204(b), 8 U.S.C. § 1154(b), as one of the determinations incident to the INS's decision whether the alien is entitled to sixth preference status.

K.R.K. Irvine, Inc. v. Landon, 699 F.2d 1006, 1008 (9th Cir. 1983). The court relied on an amicus brief from DOL that stated the following:

The labor certification made by the Secretary of Labor ... pursuant to section 212(a)[(5)] of the ... [Act] ... is binding as to the findings of whether there are able, willing, qualified, and available United States workers for the job offered to the alien, and whether employment of the alien under the terms set by the employer would adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed United States workers. *The labor certification in no way indicates that the alien offered the certified job opportunity is qualified (or not qualified) to perform the duties of that job.*

(Emphasis added.) *Id.* at 1009. The Ninth Circuit, citing *K.R.K. Irvine, Inc.*, 699 F.2d at 1006, revisited this issue, stating: "The INS, therefore, may make a de novo determination of whether the alien is in fact qualified to fill the certified job offer." *Tongatapu*, 736 F. 2d at 1309.

The key to determining the job qualifications is found on ETA Form 9089 Part H. This section of the application for alien labor certification, "Job Opportunity Information," describes the terms and conditions of the job offered. It is important that the ETA Form 9089 be read as a whole.

Moreover, when determining whether a beneficiary is eligible for a preference immigrant visa, USCIS may not ignore a term of the labor certification, nor may it impose additional requirements.

See Madany, 696 F.2d at 1015. USCIS must examine “the language of the labor certification job requirements” in order to determine what the job requires. *Id.* The only rational manner by which USCIS can be expected to interpret the meaning of terms used to describe the requirements of a job in a labor certification is to examine the certified job offer *exactly* as it is completed by the prospective employer. *See Rosedale Linden Park Company v. Smith*, 595 F. Supp. 829, 833 (D.D.C. 1984) (emphasis added). USCIS’s interpretation of the job’s requirements, as stated on the labor certification must involve reading and applying *the plain language* of the alien employment certification application form. *See id.* at 834. USCIS cannot and should not reasonably be expected to look beyond the plain language of the labor certification that DOL has formally issued or otherwise attempt to divine the employer’s intentions through some sort of reverse engineering of the labor certification.

In this matter, Part H, line 4, of the labor certification reflects that a master’s degree in information technology degree is the minimum level of education required. Line 6 reflects that twelve months of work experience in the proffered position is also required. Lines 8-A,B and C, indicate that an alternate combination of a bachelor’s degree⁵ with five years of work experience is acceptable. Line 9 reflects that a foreign educational equivalent is acceptable, and that the job title of the acceptable alternate occupation is programmer, software engineer or related occupation. Section 14 indicates that “any suitable combination of education, training, or experience is acceptable.”

On appeal, counsel refers states that this language on the certified ETA Form 9089 means that even though an applicant may not have the required degree, the applicant may use ANY suitable combination of education, training or experience to qualify for the position. (Emphasis in original.) Counsel states that the director failed to acknowledge that this language is in the labor certification and therefore the beneficiary does have the specific requirements that is needed for the position. Counsel also states that the beneficiary’s degree is more than a bachelor’s degree and therefore should satisfy the requirements.

The AAO notes that the language contained in Section 14 (commonly known as the *Kellogg* language) refers to Section 656.17(h)(4) of the PERM regulations that provides:

- (i) Alternative experience requirements must be substantially equivalent to the primary requirements of the job opportunity for which certification is sought; and
- (ii) If the alien beneficiary already is employed by the employer, and the alien does not meet the primary job requirements and only potentially qualifies for the job by virtue of the employer’s alternative requirements, certification will be denied unless the application states that any suitable

⁵ The AAO notes that the petitioner did not designate an alternate field of study for the master’s degree at line H-7. Thus, the petitioner requires either a U.S. master’s degree in information technology and one year of work experience or a baccalaureate degree in information technology with five years of work experience.

combination of education, training, or experience is acceptable.

This section of the PERM regulations is based on the Board of Alien Labor Certification Appeals (BALCA) holding in the pre-PERM case of *Federal Insurance Co.* 1994-INA-465 (Feb. 2, 1998) (en banc). In *Kellogg*, the Board held that where the alien does not meet the primary job requirements, but only potentially qualifies for the job because the employer has chosen to list alternative job requirements, the employer's alternative requirements are considered to be unlawfully tailored to the alien's qualifications, unless the employer has indicated that applicants with any suitable combination of education, training or experience are acceptable. In *Federal Insurance Co.*, the BALCA panel found that no evidence or explanation had been presented as to why it was essential for the *Kellogg* language to appear on Form 9089, other than to act as a legally binding acknowledgement or attestation by a petitioning employer that it followed the [REDACTED] requirement. BALCA held that, "because the existing Form 9089 does not reasonably accommodate an employer's ability to express this attestation, we hold that it would offend fundamental due process to deny an application for failure to write the attestation on the Form 9089."

The panel also noted that the current Form 9089 very clearly did not include a Section that even suggests that it would be the correct place to write the [REDACTED], or that Section 14 would be the correct place to place the [REDACTED] language. The panel notes that while the regulation explicitly requires that the PERM application include the [REDACTED] language where it applies, there is not effective notice to the public on how to comply with the requirement. While the USCIS is not bound to the findings of the BALCA panel, it does find their reasoning with regard to the placement of the [REDACTED] language on the ETA Form 9089 to be of guidance. Further USCIS has consulted with the DOL pursuant to its statutory consultation authority at 8 C.F.R. § 204(b). The DOL position is that the placement of the [REDACTED] language on the ETA Form 9089, based on the *Federal Insurance* decision, does not reduce the actual minimum requirements below a bachelor degree -- DOL would interpret the language as permitting alternatives to a bachelor degree that are equivalent to a bachelor degree. Thus, the [REDACTED] language would supplement the primary and alternative requirements but would not lower the educational bar further. In the instant matter, the petitioner would still need to establish that the beneficiary possesses a U.S. Master's degree or equivalent foreign degree in information technology or a U.S. baccalaureate degree or equivalent foreign degree in information technology with five years of work experience.

In Part J of the ETA Form 9089, the beneficiary indicated that the highest level of education achieved relevant to the requested occupation is a doctorate degree⁶ in medicine from the Russian State Medical University in Russia. In corroboration of the ETA Form 9089, the petitioner provided the beneficiary's Diploma with [REDACTED] that states the beneficiary completed the whole course of the Russian State Medical University, having specialized in [REDACTED] and that based on the State examination board dated [REDACTED] the beneficiary is qualified as a [REDACTED]. The record also contains a one page transcript of the beneficiary's twelve

⁶ As stated previously, the beneficiary possesses a medical degree, and not a doctorate degree in medicine.

semesters of medical studies at the [REDACTED]. The AAO notes that the beneficiary's transcript does not identify any specific coursework in information technology during the six years of her university-level studies, although course number 29 on her transcript, identified as programming, and course number 32, identified as system analysis and the automated control systems in healthcare, may have had some theoretical relationship to information technology. The overwhelming majority of the beneficiary's coursework is in the field of medicine. Thus, the beneficiary's academic qualifications do not meet the criteria stipulated in the certified ETA 9089; a master's degree in information technology or a bachelor's degree in information technology with five years of work experience.

The beneficiary does have an advanced degree based on her medical degree; and, thus, does qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act. However, the beneficiary does not meet the job requirements on the labor certification. For this reason, the petition may not be approved.

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 met that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.