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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office (AAO)
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090
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U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

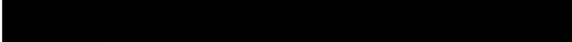
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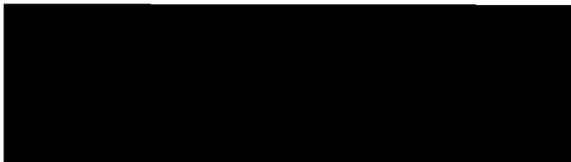
DATE: **MAY 17 2011** OFFICE: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER

FILE: 

IN RE: Petitioner: 
Beneficiary: 

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:



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 \$630. 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 Rhew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Texas Service Center, denied the employment-based immigrant visa petition, which is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The decision of the director will be withdrawn, and the matter will be remanded to the Texas Service Center for further consideration and action.

The petitioner is a software business. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as an information technology manager pursuant to section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2). As required by statute, an ETA Form 9089, Application for Permanent Employment Certification, approved by the United States Department of Labor (DOL), accompanied the petition. Upon reviewing the petition, the director determined that the beneficiary did not satisfy the minimum level of experience stated on the labor certification. Specifically, the director determined that the beneficiary did not possess five years of experience in one of the alternate occupations listed in section H, line 10, of the ETA Form 9089.

On appeal, counsel argues that the director misinterpreted the experience requirements listed on the ETA Form 9089. Counsel asserts that the minimum requirements are either a master's degree in management information systems, computer science, or a related field or a bachelor's degree plus five years of experience in the alternate occupations of IT manager, computer systems analyst, or business solutions consultant. Counsel argues that the director erred in concluding that one must possess both a master's degree and five years of experience in an alternative occupation in order to qualify for the position.

The record shows that the appeal is properly filed and timely and makes a specific allegation of error in law or fact. The procedural history in this case is documented by the record and incorporated into the decision. Further elaboration of the procedural history will be made only as necessary.

In pertinent part, section 203(b)(2) of the Act provides immigrant classification to members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent and whose services are sought by an employer in the United States. An advanced degree is a United States academic or professional degree or a foreign equivalent degree above the baccalaureate level. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). The regulation further states: "A United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree followed by at least five years of progressive experience in the specialty shall be considered the equivalent of a master's degree. If a doctoral degree is customarily required by the specialty, the alien must have a United States doctorate or a foreign equivalent degree." *Id.*

The AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis. *See Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). The AAO considers all pertinent evidence in the record, including new evidence properly submitted upon appeal.¹

¹ The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the Form I-290B, which are incorporated into the regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(a)(1). The record in the instant case provides no reason to preclude consideration of any of the documents newly submitted on appeal. *See Matter of Soriano*, 19 I&N Dec. 764 (BIA 1988).

The beneficiary possesses a Masters of Business Administration from the Maastricht School of Management, the Netherlands, specializing in Management Information Systems. Based on the record of proceeding and in consultation with the Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE), it appears more likely than not that the beneficiary has earned a foreign degree equivalent to a United States master's degree.²

Eligibility for the Classification Sought

As noted above, the ETA Form 9089 in this matter is certified by the DOL. The DOL's role is limited to determining whether there are sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified and available and whether the employment of the alien will adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed. Section 212(a)(5)(A)(i) of the Act; 20 C.F.R. § 656.1(a).

It is significant that none of the above inquiries assigned to the DOL, or the remaining regulations implementing these duties under 20 C.F.R. § 656, involve a determination as to whether or not the alien is qualified for a specific immigrant classification or even the job offered. This fact has not gone

² EDGE was created by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO). According to its website, AACRAO is "a nonprofit, voluntary, professional association of more than 10,000 higher education admissions and registration professionals who represent more than 2,600 institutions and agencies in the United States and in 28 countries." <http://www.aacrao.org/about/>. Its mission "is to serve and advance higher education by providing leadership in academic and enrollment services." *Id.* EDGE is "a web-based resource for the evaluation of foreign educational credentials." <http://aacraoedge.aacrao.org/register/>. Authors for EDGE are not merely expressing their personal opinions. Rather, they must work with a publication consultant and a Council Liaison with AACRAO's National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Credentials. See *An Author's Guide to Creating AACRAO International Publications* available at http://www.aacrao.org/publications/guide_to_creating_international_publications.pdf. If placement recommendations are included, the Council Liaison works with the author to give feedback and the publication is subject to final review by the entire Council. *Id.* U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) considers EDGE to be a reliable, peer-reviewed source of information about foreign credentials equivalencies. In *Confluence Intern., Inc. v. Holder*, 2009 WL 825793 (D.Minn. March 27, 2009), the court determined that the AAO provided a rational explanation for its reliance on information provided by AACRAO to support its decision. In *Tisco Group, Inc. v. Napolitano*, 2010 WL 3464314 (E.D.Mich. August 30, 2010), the court found that USCIS had properly weighed the evaluations submitted and the information obtained from EDGE to conclude that the alien's three-year foreign "baccalaureate" and foreign "Master's" degree were only comparable to a U.S. bachelor's degree. In *Sunshine Rehab Services, Inc.* 2010 WL 3325442 (E.D.Mich. August 20, 2010), the court upheld a USCIS determination that the alien's three-year bachelor's degree was not a foreign equivalent degree to a U.S. bachelor's degree. Specifically, the court concluded that USCIS was entitled to prefer the information in EDGE and did not abuse its discretion in reaching its conclusion.

unnoticed by federal circuit courts. See *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F. 2d 1305, 1309 (9th Cir. 1984); *Madany v. Smith*, 696 F.2d 1008, 1012-1013 (D.C. Cir. 1983).

A United States baccalaureate degree is generally found to require four years of education. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. 244 (Reg'l. Comm'r. 1977). This decision involved a petition filed under 8 U.S.C. §1153(a)(3) as amended in 1976. At that time, this section provided:

Visas shall next be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions

The Act added section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. §1153(b)(2)(A), which provides:

Visas shall be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent

Significantly, the statutory language used prior to *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. at 244, is identical to the statutory language used subsequent to that decision but for the requirement that the immigrant hold an advanced degree or its equivalent. The Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, published as part of the House of Representatives Conference Report on the Act, provides that “[in] considering equivalency in category 2 advanced degrees, it is anticipated that the alien must have a bachelor’s degree with at least five years progressive experience in the professions.” H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 955, 101st Cong., 2nd Sess. 1990, 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N. 6784, 1990 WL 201613 at *6786 (Oct. 26, 1990).

At the time of enactment of section 203(b)(2) of the Act in 1990, it had been almost thirteen years since *Matter of Shah* was issued. Congress is presumed to have intended a four-year degree when it stated that an alien “must have a bachelor’s degree” when considering equivalency for second preference immigrant visas. We must assume that Congress was aware of the agency’s previous treatment of a “bachelor’s degree” under the Act when the new classification was enacted and did not intend to alter the agency’s interpretation of that term. See *Lorillard v. Pons*, 434 U.S. 575, 580-81 (1978) (Congress is presumed to be aware of administrative and judicial interpretations where it adopts a new law incorporating sections of a prior law). See also 56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991) (an alien must have at least a bachelor’s degree).

In 1991, when the final rule for 8 C.F.R. § 204.5 was published in the Federal Register, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (the Service), responded to criticism that the regulation required an alien to have a bachelor’s degree as a minimum and that the regulation did not allow for the substitution of experience for education. After reviewing section 121 of the Immigration Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-649 (1990), and the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, the Service specifically noted that both the Act and the legislative history indicate that an alien must have at least a bachelor’s degree:

The Act states that, in order to qualify under the second classification, alien members of the professions must hold “advanced degrees or their equivalent.” As the

legislative history . . . indicates, the equivalent of an advanced degree is “a bachelor’s degree with at least five years progressive experience in the professions.” Because neither the Act nor its legislative history indicates that bachelor’s or advanced degrees must be United States degrees, the Service will recognize foreign equivalent degrees. But both the Act and its legislative history make clear that, in order to qualify as a 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, a three-year bachelor’s degree 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.”³ 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”).

³ 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.

Because, as noted above, the beneficiary has earned an academic or professional degree or a foreign equivalent degree above the baccalaureate level, the beneficiary qualifies for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as she has the minimum level of education required for an advanced degree. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). The beneficiary possesses a Masters of Business Administration from the Maastricht School of Management, the Netherlands, specializing in Management Information Systems, which appears more likely than not to be the foreign degree equivalent to a United States master's degree.

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 management information systems, computer science, or a related field is the minimum level of education required. Line 6 reflects that no experience in the job offered is required provided the beneficiary has earned a master's degree in one of the listed fields. Line 8 indicates that an alternate combination of education and experience is acceptable. This alternate combination is described on lines 8-A and 8-C. Line 8-A reflects that the alternate permissible level of education is a bachelor's degree, and line 8-C reflects that the number of years of experience acceptable in the alternate combination is five. Finally, line 10 reflects that the five years of experience required within the alternate combination may be in the alternate occupations of IT manager, computer systems analyst, or business solutions consultant. Line 9 reflects that a foreign educational equivalent is acceptable.

In his decision, the director concluded that the beneficiary did not satisfy the minimum level of experience stated on the labor certification. Specifically, the director determined that the beneficiary did not possess five years of experience in one of the alternate occupations listed in section H, line 10, of the ETA Form 9089, even though she may have earned a master's degree or a foreign equivalent degree.

On appeal, counsel argues that the director misinterpreted the experience requirements listed on the ETA Form 9089. Counsel asserts that the minimum requirements are either a master's degree in management information systems, computer science, or a related field or a bachelor's degree plus five years of experience in the alternate occupations of IT manager, computer systems analyst, or business solutions consultant. Counsel argues that the director erred in concluding that one must possess both a master's degree and five years of experience in an alternative occupation in order to qualify for the position.

As evidence of its intent in drafting the terms of the ETA Form 9089, counsel submits on appeal a letter dated September 12, 2008 to the DOL in response to the DOL's audit notification. In that letter, counsel explained to the DOL that Part H of the ETA Form 9089 requires a master's degree and no experience. As an attachment to the September 12, 2008 letter, counsel included a statement from the petitioner stating the following:

In this case, Part H-10 of the ETA 9089 pertains to the **job requirement of Alternate combination of education and experience**. I had to list it in H-10 part, because the

required experience in the alternate combination has to be in the job positions of IT Manager/Computer System Analyst/Business Solutions Consultant as listed in 10-B of ETA 9089.

Counsel concludes that, since the DOL approved the ETA Form 9089 after receiving the petitioner's response to its Audit Notification, it must have been satisfied with this explanation since a job requirement of a master's degree plus five years experience in an alternative occupation would have exceeded the normal requirements for the position.

Finally, counsel submits recruitment material, including newspaper advertisements, which indicate that the minimum qualifications for the job are either a master's degree or a bachelor's degree plus five years of experience.

Upon review, the AAO agrees with counsel that the experience requirement expressed on line 10 pertains to the alternate combination of education and experience expressed on lines 8, 8-A, and 8-C. The five-year experience requirement in an alternative occupation does not apply if the worker has earned a master's degree. This requirement only applies if a worker is attempting to qualify for the position with only a bachelor's degree, which is the alternate level of education expressed on line 8-A. As explained by counsel, if a worker has earned a master's degree or a foreign equivalent degree in one of the required fields, as the beneficiary has done in this case, the beneficiary need not have any qualifying experience. As there is no way for an employer to explain in line 8-C that the five years of experience permissible in the alternative combination of education and experience may be in a related occupation, it is logical for this illustration to have been included on lines 10 and 10-B. It appears from the record that it is more likely than not that both the DOL and the petitioner intended the ETA Form 9089 to be interpreted in this way, and it appears that any potential U.S. workers were properly notified of these minimum job requirements.

Accordingly, the director's decision is withdrawn, and the AAO concludes that the beneficiary meets the requirements of the ETA Form 9089 with a master's degree or foreign equivalent degree in a related field.

Ability to Pay the Proffered Wage

Notwithstanding the prior determination, and beyond the decision of the director, the petitioner has not established that it has the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date of the petition. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2).

The regulation 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) states in pertinent part:

Ability of prospective employer to pay wage. Any petition filed by or for an employment-based immigrant which requires an offer of employment must be accompanied by evidence that the prospective United States employer has the ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must demonstrate this ability at the time the priority date is established and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful

permanent residence. Evidence of this ability shall be either in the form of copies of annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements.

The petitioner must demonstrate the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, which is the date the ETA Form 9089 was accepted for processing by any office within the employment system of the DOL. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d).

Here, the Form ETA 9089 was accepted on May 12, 2008. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 9089 is \$94,800.00 per year.

The evidence in the record of proceeding shows that the petitioner in this matter is a California corporation called Specialists in [REDACTED], which has federal employer identification number (FEIN) [REDACTED]. This is the name of the employer and FEIN listed in Part C of the ETA Form 9089. This is also the FEIN attributed to the petitioner in Part 1 of the Form I-140. Although the petitioner lists its name in the Form I-140 as [REDACTED]" it appears more likely than not that [REDACTED] is an abbreviation for Specialists in [REDACTED] and that [REDACTED] is actually the 100% stockholder of Specialists in [REDACTED] [REDACTED], which has FEIN [REDACTED] does appear to be the petitioner in this matter.⁴

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of an ETA Form 9089 labor certification application establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on the ETA Form 9089, the petitioner must establish that the job offer was realistic as of the priority date and that the offer remained realistic for each year thereafter, until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. The petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is an essential element in evaluating whether a job offer is realistic. *See Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2). In evaluating whether a job offer is realistic, USCIS requires the petitioner to demonstrate financial resources sufficient to pay the beneficiary's proffered wages, although the totality of the circumstances affecting the petitioning business will be considered if the evidence warrants such consideration. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage during a given period, USCIS will first examine whether the petitioner employed and paid the beneficiary during that period. If the petitioner establishes by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to

⁴ If [REDACTED] were construed by the AAO to be the petitioner in the matter, the petition would likely be denied for failure to be accompanied by a labor certification which pertains to the proffered position. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(i). Labor certifications are only valid for the particular job opportunity listed in the ETA Form 9089. 20 C.F.R. § 656.30(c). The only way for [REDACTED] to use a labor certification filed by a different corporation, even a corporation in which it has a controlling ownership interest, is to establish that it has become a successor-in-interest to that corporation. *See Matter of Dial Auto Repair Shop, Inc.*, 19 I&N Dec. 481 (Comm'r 1986). Regardless, as the FEIN listed in the Form I-140 belongs to Specialists in [REDACTED], the petitioner will not be construed to be [REDACTED].

or greater than the proffered wage, the evidence will be considered *prima facie* proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.

In the instant case, the petitioner, Specialists in [REDACTED] (FEIN [REDACTED]) has submitted a 2009 Form W-2 indicating that it paid the beneficiary \$101,423.14 in that year. Accordingly, the petitioner has established its ability to pay the proffered wage in 2009. However, the record is devoid of evidence of wages paid to the beneficiary in 2008.

If the petitioner does not establish that it employed and paid the beneficiary an amount at least equal to the proffered wage during that period, USCIS will next examine the net income figure reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses. *River Street Donuts, LLC v. Napolitano*, 558 F.3d 111 (1st Cir. 2009); *Taco Especial v. Napolitano*, 696 F. Supp. 2d 873 (E.D. Mich. 2010). Reliance on federal income tax returns as a basis for determining a petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is well established by judicial precedent. *Elatos Restaurant Corp. v. Sava*, 632 F. Supp. 1049, 1054 (S.D.N.Y. 1986) (citing *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F.2d 1305 (9th Cir. 1984)); see also *Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F. Supp. 532 (N.D. Texas 1989); *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. 1080 (S.D.N.Y. 1985); *Ubeda v. Palmer*, 539 F. Supp. 647 (N.D. Ill. 1982), *aff'd*, 703 F.2d 571 (7th Cir. 1983). Reliance on the petitioner's gross sales and profits and wage expense is misplaced. Showing that the petitioner's gross sales and profits exceeded the proffered wage is insufficient. Similarly, showing that the petitioner paid wages in excess of the proffered wage is insufficient.

In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. at 1084, the court held that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now CIS, had properly relied on the petitioner's net income figure, as stated on the petitioner's corporate income tax returns, rather than the petitioner's gross income. The court specifically rejected the argument that the Service should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income. See *Taco Especial v. Napolitano*, 696 F. Supp. 2d at 881 (gross profits overstate an employer's ability to pay because it ignores other necessary expenses).

With respect to depreciation, the court in *River Street Donuts* noted:

The AAO recognized that a depreciation deduction is a systematic allocation of the cost of a tangible long-term asset and does not represent a specific cash expenditure during the year claimed. Furthermore, the AAO indicated that the allocation of the depreciation of a long-term asset could be spread out over the years or concentrated into a few depending on the petitioner's choice of accounting and depreciation methods. Nonetheless, the AAO explained that depreciation represents an actual cost of doing business, which could represent either the diminution in value of buildings and equipment or the accumulation of funds necessary to replace perishable equipment and buildings. Accordingly, the AAO stressed that even though amounts deducted for depreciation do not represent current use of cash, neither does it represent amounts available to pay wages.

We find that the AAO has a rational explanation for its policy of not adding depreciation back to net income. Namely, that the amount spent on a long term tangible asset is a "real" expense.

River Street Donuts at 118. “[USCIS] and judicial precedent support the use of tax returns and the net income figures in determining petitioner’s ability to pay. Plaintiffs’ argument that these figures should be revised by the court by adding back depreciation is without support.” *Chi-Feng Chang* at 537 (emphasis added).

For a C corporation, USCIS considers net income to be the figure shown on Line 28 of the Form 1120, U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return. If the net income the petitioner demonstrates it had available during that period, if any, does not equal the amount of the proffered wage or more, USCIS will then review the petitioner’s assets. Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner’s current assets and current liabilities.⁵ A corporation’s year-end current assets are shown on Schedule L, lines 1 through 6 and include cash-on-hand. Its year-end current liabilities are shown on lines 16 through 18. If the total of a corporation’s end-of-year net current assets and the wages paid to the beneficiary (if any) are equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the petitioner is expected to be able to pay the proffered wage using those net current assets.

In this matter, the petitioner, Specialists in [REDACTED], did not submit its tax return for 2008. Instead, the petitioner submits a tax return for [REDACTED] & Subsidiary.” It appears that Specialists in [REDACTED] is the subsidiary to which the tax return is referring and that [REDACTED] as the sole stockholder of the petitioner, files a consolidated tax return which includes the petitioner. However, USCIS may not “pierce the corporate veil” and look to the assets of the corporation’s owner to satisfy the corporation’s ability to pay the proffered wage even if the parent company chooses to file a consolidated tax return. It is an elementary rule that a corporation is a separate and distinct legal entity from its owners and shareholders. See *Matter of M*, 8 I&N Dec. 24 (BIA 1958), *Matter of Aphrodite Investments, Ltd.*, 17 I&N Dec. 530 (Comm’r 1980), and *Matter of Tessel*, 17 I&N Dec. 631 (Acting Assoc. Comm’r 1980). Consequently, the assets of its shareholder or of other enterprises or corporations cannot be considered in determining the petitioning corporation’s ability to pay the proffered wage. In this case, the petitioner is Specialists in [REDACTED], and it must be established to have the ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner’s sole stockholder’s ability to pay the wage may not be considered. Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm’r 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg’l Comm’r 1972)).

⁵According to *Barron’s Dictionary of Accounting Terms* 117 (3rd ed. 2000), “current assets” consist of items having (in most cases) a life of one year or less, such as cash, marketable securities, inventory and prepaid expenses. “Current liabilities” are obligations payable (in most cases) within one year, such accounts payable, short-term notes payable, and accrued expenses (such as taxes and salaries). *Id.* at 118.

Regardless, even if the 2008 consolidated tax return were considered as probative of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage, it would not establish that ability. [REDACTED] 2008 net income was -\$1,307,447.00 and its end-of-year net current assets were -\$3,590,763.00.

Therefore, for 2008, neither the petitioner nor its stockholder, to the extent relevant, had sufficient net income or net current assets to pay the proffered wage.

USCIS may consider the overall magnitude of the petitioner's business activities in its determination of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612. The petitioning entity in *Sonogawa* had been in business for over 11 years and routinely earned a gross annual income of about \$100,000. During the year in which the petition was filed in that case, the petitioner changed business locations and paid rent on both the old and new locations for five months. There were large moving costs and also a period of time when the petitioner was unable to do regular business. The Regional Commissioner determined that the petitioner's prospects for a resumption of successful business operations were well established. The petitioner was a fashion designer whose work had been featured in *Time* and *Look* magazines. Her clients included Miss Universe, movie actresses, and society matrons. The petitioner's clients had been included in the lists of the best-dressed California women. The petitioner lectured on fashion design at design and fashion shows throughout the United States and at colleges and universities in California. The Regional Commissioner's determination in *Sonogawa* was based in part on the petitioner's sound business reputation and outstanding reputation as a couturiere. As in *Sonogawa*, USCIS may, at its discretion, consider evidence relevant to the petitioner's financial ability that falls outside of a petitioner's net income and net current assets. USCIS may consider such factors as the number of years the petitioner has been doing business, the established historical growth of the petitioner's business, the overall number of employees, the occurrence of any uncharacteristic business expenditures or losses, the petitioner's reputation within its industry, whether the beneficiary is replacing a former employee or an outsourced service, or any other evidence that USCIS deems relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.

In the instant case, considering the totality of the circumstances, there is insufficient evidence to establish that the petitioner, Specialists in [REDACTED], had the ability to pay the proffered wage in 2008. The 2008 consolidated tax return for [REDACTED], which is of little use in evaluating the petitioner's sole ability to pay the proffered wage, shows the parent company suffering enormous losses in net income and substantial negative net current assets. Although the petitioner claims to employ 1,250 people in the Form I-140 and to have been established in 1982, it is unclear whether these averments pertain to the petitioner, the parent company, or a combination of various affiliated entities whose obligation to pay the proffered wage in this case seems less than likely. Also, as noted in the petitioner's letter dated June 14, 2010, the petitioner's stock was acquired only in 2006 by [REDACTED], approximately 2 years before the priority date. It is unclear whether this change in ownership structure affected the petitioner's financial strength or is what caused the significant losses shown on [REDACTED] consolidated return.

Finally, the petitioner's claim to have the ability to pay the proffered wage in 2008 is further undermined by the presence of two other simultaneously pending Form I-140 petitions for different

beneficiaries. USCIS electronic records show that petitions bearing receipt numbers [REDACTED] had priority dates prior to 2008 and that their respective beneficiaries did not adjust in 2008. Therefore, the petitioner must produce evidence that its job offer to each beneficiary is realistic, and therefore that it has the ability to pay the proffered wages to each of the three beneficiaries of its pending petitions, as of the priority date of each petition and continuing until the beneficiary of each petition obtains lawful permanent residence. *See Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142, 144-145 (Acting Reg'l Comm'r 1977) (petitioner must establish ability to pay as of the date of the Form MA 7-50B job offer, the predecessor to the Form ETA 750 and ETA Form 9089). *See also* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2).

The evidence submitted does not establish that the petitioner had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, and the petition cannot be approved for that reason.

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 director's decision is withdrawn; however, the petition is currently unapprovable for the reasons discussed above, and therefore the AAO may not approve the petition at this time. Because the petition is not approvable, the petition is remanded to the director for issuance of a new, detailed decision.