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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 and Immigration Services

[redacted]

FILE: EAC 06 081 53160 Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER Date: MAY 19 2009

IN RE: Petitioner: [redacted]
Beneficiary:

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Skilled Worker or Professional Pursuant to Section 203(b)(3) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

[redacted]

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.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. Please refer to 8 C.F.R. § 103.5 for the specific requirements. 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. Any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen, as required by 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i).

John F. Grissom
Acting Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Nebraska Service Center, denied the employment-based immigrant visa petition, which is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is an information technology consulting firm. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a programmer analyst. An ETA Form 9089, Application for Permanent Certification approved by the Department of Labor (DOL), accompanied the petition. Upon reviewing the petition, the director determined that the beneficiary did not satisfy the minimum level of education stated on the labor certification.

On appeal, the petitioner, through counsel, submits additional evidence related to the beneficiary's employment experience. Counsel contends that the beneficiary's educational credentials satisfied the terms of the labor certification and that the petition should be approved.

The AAO maintains plenary power to review each appeal on a de novo basis. 5 U.S.C. § 557(b) ("On appeal from or review of the initial decision, the agency has all the powers which it would have in making the initial decision except as it may limit the issues on notice or by rule."); *see also, Janka v. U.S. Dept. of Transp., NTSB,* 925 F.2d 1147, 1149 (9th Cir. 1991). The AAO's *de novo* authority has been long recognized by the federal courts. *See, e.g. Dor v. INS,* 891 F.2d 997, 1002 n. 9 (2d Cir. 1989).

For the reasons discussed below, we concur with the director's denial of the petition, but would also note that various decisions by federal circuit courts, which are binding on this office, have upheld our authority to evaluate whether the beneficiary is qualified for the job offered.

Section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)(i), provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing skilled labor (requiring at least two years training or experience), not of a temporary nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States. Section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)(ii), also provides for the granting of preference classification to qualified immigrants who hold baccalaureate degrees and are members of the professions.

The petitioner must demonstrate that a beneficiary has the necessary education and experience specified on the labor certification as of the priority date, the day the ETA Form 9089 was accepted for processing by any office within DOL's employment system. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d); *Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N 158 (Act. Reg. Comm. 1977). Here, the ETA Form 9089 was accepted for processing on September 15, 2005. It indicates that the petitioner has employed the beneficiary since January 2, 2005. The Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker (I-140) was filed on January 25, 2006.

The ETA Form 9089, Part H set forth the minimum requirements for the position of programmer analyst. Part H, Item(s) 4 and 4-B reflect that the proffered position requires a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. Part H, Item 7 indicates that the employer will also accept an alternate field of study of engineering. Part H-6 reflects that the employer requires 24 months of work experience in the job offered. Part H, Item 8 indicates that the employer will not accept an alternative combination of education and experience. Part H, Item 9 indicates that a foreign educational equivalent is acceptable. Part H, Item 10 indicates that the employer will not accept experience in an alternate occupation. Part H-14 does not list any other specific skills or requirements.

Part I, Item a-1, indicates that the petitioner considers the certified position as a professional occupation.

In determining whether a beneficiary is eligible for a preference immigrant visa, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must ascertain whether the alien is, in fact, qualified for the certified job. USCIS will not accept a degree equivalency or an unrelated degree when a labor certification plainly and expressly requires a candidate with a specific degree. In evaluating the beneficiary's qualifications, USCIS must look to the job offer portion of the labor certification to determine the required qualifications for the position. USCIS may not ignore a term of the labor certification, nor may it impose additional requirements. *See Matter of Silver Dragon Chinese Restaurant*, 19 I&N Dec. 401, 406 (Comm. 1986). *See also*, *Madany*, 696 F.2d at 1008; *K.R.K. Irvine, Inc.*, 699 F.2d at 1006; *Stewart Infra-Red Commissary of Massachusetts, Inc. v. Coomey*, 661 F.2d 1 (1st Cir. 1981).

As stated on the labor certification, the proffered position requires a bachelor's in computer science or engineering, as well as 24 months of experience in the job offered. Because of the certified position's academic requirements set forth on the labor certification as well as the petitioner's classification of the occupation as a professional on Item I, a-1 of the ETA Form 9089, the proffered position will be evaluated as a professional. In some circumstances it might also be considered as a skilled worker position. DOL assigned the occupational code of 15-1031.00, computer software engineer application, to the proffered position. DOL's occupational codes are assigned based on normalized occupational standards. According to DOL's public online database at *http://online.onetcenter.org/crosswalk/SOC?s=15-1031&g=Go*[1] and extensive description of the position and requirements for the job, the position falls within Job Zone Four requiring "considerable preparation" for the occupation type closest to the proffered position. According to DOL, two to four years of work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed for such an occupation. DOL assigns a standard vocational preparation (SVP) range of 7-8 to the occupation, which means "[m]ost of these occupations require a four-year bachelor's degree, but some do not." *See http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/15-1031.00.*[2] Additionally, DOL states the following concerning the training and overall experience required for these occupations:

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[1] (Accessed 4/03/09).
[2] (Accessed 4/03/09).

> A minimum of two to four years of work-related skill, knowledge, or experience is needed for these occupations. For example, an accountant must complete four years of college and work for several years in accounting to be considered qualified. Employees in these occupations usually need several years of work-related experience, on-the-job training, and/or vocational training.

See id.

More specific to this position, O*NET provides that 85 percent of responding computer software engineers, applications have a bachelor's degree or higher.[3] Further, DOL's Occupation Outlook Handbook, available online at http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos267.htm, provides:

> **Education and Training.** Most employers prefer applicants who have at least a bachelor's degree and broad knowledge of, and experience with, a variety of computer systems and technologies. The usual college major for applications software engineers is computer science or software engineering. Systems software engineers often study computer science or computer information systems. Graduate degrees are preferred for some of the more complex jobs. In 2006, about 80 percent of workers had a bachelor's degree or higher.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(C) states the following:

> If the petition is for a professional, the petition must be accompanied by evidence that the alien holds a United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree and by evidence that the alien is a member of the professions. Evidence of a baccalaureate degree shall be in the form of an official college or university record showing the date the baccalaureate degree was awarded and the area of concentration of study. To show that the alien is a member of the professions, the petitioner must submit evidence that the minimum of a baccalaureate degree is required for entry into the occupation.

The above regulations use a singular description of foreign equivalent degree. Thus, the plain meaning of the regulatory language concerning the professional classification sets forth the requirement that a beneficiary must produce one degree that is determined to be the foreign equivalent of a U.S. baccalaureate degree in order to be qualified as a professional for third preference visa category purposes.

As noted above, the ETA Form 9089 in this matter is certified by DOL. Section 212(a)(5)(A)(i) of the Act provides:

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[3] *See http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/13-2011.01.*

> In general.-Any alien who seeks to enter the United States for the purpose of performing skilled or unskilled labor is inadmissible, unless the Secretary of Labor has determined and certified to the Secretary of State and the Attorney General that-
>
> > (I) there are not sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified (or equally qualified in the case of an alien described in clause (ii)) and available at the time of application for a visa and admission to the United States and at the place where the alien is to perform such skilled or unskilled labor, and
> >
> > (II) the employment of such alien will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed.

According to 20 C.F.R. § 656.1(a), the purpose and scope of the regulations regarding labor certification are as follows:

> Under § 212(a)(5)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(5)(A)) certain aliens may not obtain a visa for entrance into the United States in order to engage in permanent employment unless the Secretary of Labor has first certified to the Secretary of State and to the Attorney General that:
>
> > (1) There are not sufficient United States workers, who are able, willing, qualified and available at the time of application for a visa and admission into the United States and at the place where the alien is to perform the work, and
> >
> > (2) The employment of the alien will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of United States workers similarly employed.

It is significant that none of the above inquiries assigned to 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 unnoticed by Federal Circuit Courts.

> There is no doubt that the authority to make preference classification decisions rests with INS. **The language of section 204 cannot be read otherwise.** ***See Castaneda-Gonzalez v. INS***, 564 F.2d 417, 429 (D.C. Cir. 1977). In turn, DOL has the authority **to make the two determinations listed in section 212(a)(14). Id. at 423. The** necessary result of these two grants of authority is that section 212(a)(14) determinations are not subject to review by INS absent fraud or willful misrepresentation, but all matters relating to preference classification eligibility not expressly delegated to DOL remain within INS' authority.

> Given the language of the Act, the totality of the legislative history, and the agencies' own interpretations of their duties under the Act, we must conclude that Congress did not intend DOL to have primary authority to make any determinations other than the two stated in section 212(a)(14). If DOL is to analyze alien qualifications, it is for the purpose of "matching" them with those of corresponding United States workers so that it will then be "in a position to meet the requirement of the law," namely the section 212(a)(14) determinations.

Madany v. Smith, 696 F.2d 1008, 1012-1013 (D.C. Cir. 1983). Relying in part on *Madany*, 696 F.2d at 1008, the 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)(14) 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 Department of Labor ("DOL") must certify that insufficient domestic workers are available to perform the job and that the alien's performance of the job will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed domestic workers. *Id.* § 212(a)(14), 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(14). **The INS then makes its own** determination of the alien's entitlement to sixth preference status. *Id.* § 204(b), 8 U.S.C. § 1154(b). *See generally K.R.K. Irvine, Inc. v. Landon*, 699 F.2d 1006, 1008 9th Cir.1983).
>
> The INS, therefore, may make a *de novo* determination of whether the alien is in fact qualified to fill the certified job offer.

Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman, 736 F. 2d 1305, 1309 (9th Cir. 1984).

In this matter, in Part J, Item 11 of the ETA Form 9089, the beneficiary indicated that the highest level of education achieved relevant to the requested occupation is "Bachelor's." Part J, Item (s) 12,13, and 14 of the ETA Form 9089 indicate that she completed relevant education in 1995 at the National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) located in Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, Delhi, India.

As noted in the request for evidence issued by the AAO, the petitioner provided copies of the beneficiary's educational documents, which included her 1995 Bachelor of Commerce degree from the University of Delhi. As there was no grade transcript submitted in support of this diploma, there is no indication that the beneficiary took any computer or engineering courses during the pursuit of this degree.

The petitioner also provided a certificate from NIIT indicating that the beneficiary completed a course entitled "Diploma in Computer Applications" following one year of study from 1994-1995; a copy of a certificate in computer applications from NIIT conferred in 1996; a certificate in web application programming from NIIT indicating the beneficiary completed a 25 day course in June 2000; and a copy of a June 30, 1995, grade transcript from NIIT referring to a program that lasted one year.

A credentials evaluation from Multinational Education & Information Services, Inc., dated May 18, 2004 was also provided by [redacted]. He states that the beneficiary received a three-year bachelor's degree in commerce from the University of Delhi in 1994, which is the U.S. equivalent of three years of academic studies that would be transferable to a U.S. university. Dr. [redacted] describes the beneficiary's NIIT studies as a 1995 diploma in computer applications, a 1996 certificate in computer applications, and a certificate in web application programming (2000). As to the NIIT studies, he determines that they represent "over one year program of post-secondary academic studies and transferable to a vocational training institution in the United States." However, [redacted] then concludes when the beneficiary's bachelor's degree in commerce is combined with her studies at NIIT, she has the obtained the U.S. equivalent of a "Bachelor degree in Commerce and Computer Applications from an institution of tertiary education in the United States."

In the AAO's request for evidence, the petitioner was advised that the AAO had reviewed the Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE) created by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officer (AACRAO). AACRAO, according to its website, www.aacrao.org, 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 EDGE, http://aacraoedge.accrao.org/register/index/php, EDGE is "a web-based resource for the evaluation of foreign educational credentials."

EDGE provides a great deal of information about the educational system in India, and while it confirms that a bachelor of commerce degree is awarded upon completion of two or three years of tertiary study beyond the Higher Secondary Certificate (or equivalent) and represents attainment of a level of education comparable to two to three years of university study in the United States, it does not suggest that a three-year degree from India may be deemed a foreign equivalent degree to a U.S. baccalaureate. EDGE discusses both Post Secondary Diplomas, for which the entrance requirement is completion of secondary education, and Post Graduate Diplomas, for which the entrance requirement is completion of a two- or three-year baccalaureate. EDGE provides that a Post Secondary Diploma is comparable to one year of university study in the United States but does not suggest that, if combined with a three-year degree, may be deemed a foreign equivalent degree to a U.S. baccalaureate. EDGE further asserts that a Postgraduate Diploma following a three-year bachelor's degree "represents attainment of a level of education comparable to a bachelor's degree in the United States." The "Advice to Author Notes," however, provides:

> Postgraduate Diplomas should be issued by an accredited university or institution approved by the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Some students complete PGDs over two years on a part-time basis. When examining the Postgraduate Diploma, note the entrance requirement and be careful not to confuse the PGD awarded after the Higher Secondary Certificate with the PGD awarded after the three-year bachelor's degree.

The AAO further advised the petitioner that the record did not contain any evidence showing the beneficiary holds a four-year US bachelor's degree in one of the required fields, computer science or engineering, nor does the record contain any evidence showing that the NIIT documents represent a postgraduate diploma issued by an accredited university or institution approved by AICTE and its entrance requirement is the three-year bachelor's degree. Therefore, the petitioner was requested to submit such evidence. The petitioner was also requested to provide evidence of its recruitment efforts in order to demonstrate whether it communicated to otherwise available qualified U.S. workers that some other kind of combination of certificates, diplomas or degrees were acceptable to qualify for the offered position.

The petitioner did not submit a response to the AAO's request for evidence.

The director denied the petition on April 10, 2007, based on his determination that the petitioner had failed to establish that the beneficiary's combination of certificates and diplomas satisfied the terms of the labor certification requiring a bachelor's degree.

On appeal, contending that the beneficiary's credentials fulfilled the terms of the labor certification, counsel asserts that the language of the ETA Form 9089 indicating that the employer will accept a

foreign educational equivalent was sufficient to establish that a combination of degrees or certificates would suffice. If this is the petitioner's intent on the ETA Form 9089, it was not expressed as such. Moreover, with respect to the Sambandham evaluation, it is noted that he characterized the beneficiary's NIIT studies as equivalent to a vocational program and then concluded that they can be combined with the three year bachelor's degree in commerce to simultaneously represent university level credits. The AAO does not find this evaluation to be probative of the beneficiary's possession of a bachelor's degree in computer science or engineering. USCIS may, in its discretion, use advisory opinions statements submitted as expert testimony. *See Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791, 795 (Commr. 1988). USCIS, however, is ultimately responsible for making the final determination regarding an alien's eligibility for the benefit sought. *Id.* USCIS may even give less weight to an opinion that is not corroborated, in accord with other information or is in any way questionable. *Id.* at 795; *see also Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Commr. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Regl. Commr. 1972)). Here, the Sambandham evaluation impermissibly combines academic university-level studies with vocational classes.

Further, it is noted that the petitioner failed to provide evidence that the prerequisite for admission to the NIIT program was a three year degree as advised by AACRAO. Further, the record fails to indicate that NIIT was empowered to confer university accredited hours at the time of the benefic iary's admission or attendance. EDGE does not provide that NIIT is recognized as an official university level credential or that it would have any U.S. educational equivalent. Additionally, it is noted that based on a review of the AICTE listings (http://www.nba-aicte.ernet.in/nmna.htm site,[4] NIIT, is not an accredited institution within the state of Delhi.

There is no provision in the statute or the regulations that would allow a beneficiary to qualify under section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act with anything less than a full baccalaureate degree. More specifically, a combination of certificates and diplomas, will not be considered to be the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. A United States baccalaureate degree is generally found to require four years of education. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. 244 (Reg. Comm. 1977). Under section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act, the beneficiary must have a single degree that is the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. Because the beneficiary does not have a "United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree," the beneficiary does not qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(3) of the Act as she does not have the minimum level of education required for the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. Even if considering at most, the beneficiary's attainment of three years of undergraduate university studies represented by the bachelor of commerce degree, this would not qualify as full bachelor's degree in computer science or engineering as indicated on the ETA Form 9089. Moreover, as noted above, the petitioner affirmed in H-8 of the ETA Form 9089 that it would not accept an alternate combination of education and experience. If a defined alternate combination was acceptable, then the petitioner could have described this alternative in other provisions in part H-8 or even in H-14 where other requirements are also permitted to be specified.

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[4] (Accessed April 2, 2009).

As noted above, the petitioner designated this occupation as a professional position. Even if this job could also be considered in the skilled worker category as defined in section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Act,[5] the evidence related to the petitioner's intent as to the acceptable alternative requirements pertinent to the employer's recruitment efforts remains relevant.

We are cognizant of the decision in *Grace Korean United Methodist Church v. Michael Chertoff,* 437 F. Supp. 2d 1174 (D. Or. 2005) which found that [USCIS] "does not have the authority or expertise to impose its strained definition of 'B.A. or equivalent' on that term as set forth in the labor certification." *Id.* At 1178. In contrast to the broad precedential authority of the case law of a United States circuit court, the AAO is not bound to follow the published decision of a United States district court in matters arising within the same district. *See Matter of K-S-*, 20 I&N Dec. 715 (BIA 1993). Although the reasoning underlying a district judge's decision will be given due consideration when it is properly before the AAO, the analysis does not have to be followed as a matter of law. *Id.* at 719. The court in *Grace Korean* makes no attempt to distinguish its holding from the Circuit Court decisions cited above. Instead, as legal support for its determination, the court cited to a case holding that the United States Postal Service has no expertise or special competence in immigration matters. *Grace Korean United Methodist Church* at *8 (citing *Tovar v. U.S. Postal Service*, 3 F.3d 1271, 1276 (9th Cir. 1993)). On its face, *Tovar* is easily distinguishable from the present matter since USCIS, through the authority delegated by the Secretary of Homeland Security, is charged by statute with the enforcement of the United States immigration laws and not with the delivery of mail. *See* section 103(a) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1103(a). In reaching this decision, the court also concluded that the employer in that case tailored the job requirements to the employee and that DOL would have considered the beneficiary's credentials in evaluating the job requirements listed on the labor certification.[6]

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[5]The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3) further provides:

> (ii) *Other documentation*—
>
> > (B) *Skilled workers.* If the petition is for a skilled worker, the petition must be accompanied by evidence that the alien meets the educational, training or experience, and any other requirements of the individual labor certification, meets the requirements for Schedule A designation, or meets the requirements for the Labor Market Information Pilot Program occupation designation. The minimum requirements for this classification are at least two years of training or experience.

[6] Specifically, as quoted above, the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.21(b)(6) requires the employer to "clearly document . . . that all U.S. workers who applied for the position were rejected for lawful job related reasons." BALCA has held that an employer cannot simply reject a U.S. worker that meets the minimum requirements specified on the Form ETA-750. *See American Café,* 1990 INA 26 (BALCA 1991), *Fritz Garage*, 1988 INA 98 (BALCA 1988), and *Vanguard Jewelry Corp.* 1988

Additionally, we also note the subsequent decision in *Snapnames.com, Inc. v. Michael Chertoff*, 2006 WL 3491005 (D. Ore. November 30, 2006). In that case, the ETA 750 labor certification application specified an educational requirement of four years of college and a 'B.S. or foreign equivalent.' The district court determined that 'B.S. or foreign equivalent' relates solely to the alien's educational background, precluding consideration of the alien's combined education and work experience as a "specific level of *educational background*.". *Snapnames.com, Inc.* at *6. Additionally, the court determined that the word 'equivalent' in the employer's educational requirements was ambiguous and that in the context of skilled worker petitions (where there is no statutory educational requirement), deference must be given to the employer's intent. *Snapnames.com, Inc.* at *14. However, in professional and advanced degree professional cases, where the beneficiary is

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INA 273 (BALCA 1988). Thus, the court's suggestion in *Grace Korean* that the employer tailored the job requirements to the alien instead of the job offered actually implies that the recruitment was unlawful. If, in fact, DOL is looking at whether the job requirements are unduly restrictive and whether U.S. applicants met the job requirements on the Form ETA 750, instead of whether the alien meets them, it becomes immediately relevant whether DOL considers "B.A. or equivalent" to require a U.S. bachelor degree or a foreign degree that is equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree. We are satisfied that DOL's interpretation matches our own. In reaching this conclusion, we rely on the reasoning articulated in *Hong Video Technology*, 1998 INA 202 (BALCA 2001). That case involved a labor certification that required a "B.S. or equivalent." The Certifying Officer questioned this requirement as the correct minimum for the job as the alien did not possess a Bachelor of Science degree. In rebuttal, the employer's attorney asserted that the beneficiary had the equivalent of a Bachelor of Science degree as demonstrated through a combination of work experience and formal education. The Certifying Officer concluded that "a combination of education and experience to meet educational requirements is unacceptable as it is unfavorable to U.S. workers." BALCA concluded:

> We have held in *Francis Kellogg,* et als., 94-INA-465, 94 INA-544, 95-INA-68 (Feb. 2, 1998 (en banc) that where, as here, the alien does not meet the primary job requirements, but only potentially qualifies for the job because the employer has chose to list alternative job requirements, the employer's alternative requirements are unlawfully tailored to the alien's qualifications, in violation of [20 C.F.R.] § 656.21(b)(5), unless the employer has indicated that applicants with any suitable combination of education, training or experience are acceptable. Therefore, the employer's alternative requirements are unlawfully tailored to the alien's qualifications, in violation of [20 C.F.R.] § 65[6].21(b)(5).
>
> In as much as Employer's stated minimum requirement was a "B.S. or equivalent" degree in Electronic Technology or Education Technology and the Alien did not meet that requirement, labor certification was properly denied.

statutorily required to hold a baccalaureate degree, the court determined that [USCIS] properly concluded that a single foreign degree or its equivalent is required. *Snapnames.com, Inc.* at *17, 19.

However, in *Maramjaya v. USCIS,* Civ. Act. No. 06-2158 (RCL) (D.C. Cir. March 26, 2008) the court upheld an interpretation that a "bachelor's or equivalent" requirement necessitated a single four-year degree in a professional category and additionally noted that the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(B) required skilled workers to submit evidence that they meet the minimum job requirements of the individual labor certification. In that case, the ETA 750 described the educational requirement as Bachelor's or equivalent" and that it required a four-year education. The court additionally upheld the USCIS denial in this context as well, where it would have necessitated the combination of the alien's other credentials with his three-year diploma to meet the requirements of the ETA 750. *Id* at *13-14. In this case, the beneficiary must possess a bachelor's degree in computer science or engineering. The petitioner failed to specify any defined equivalency on the ETA Form 9089. The beneficiary's formal education does not equate to a bachelor's degree in computer science or engineering or satisfy the requirements of the labor certification in either a professional or skilled worker category.

It is noted that that as referenced in *Rosedale Linden Park Company v. Smith*, 595 F. Supp. 829, 833 (D.D.C. 1984), USCIS is obliged to "examine the certified job offer *exactly* as it is completed by the prospective employer." (Emphasis added) USCIS' interpretation of the job's requirements, as stated on the labor certification must involve "reading and applying *the plain language* of the [labor certification application form]." *Id.* at 834 (emphasis added).

The beneficiary has not completed four years of college culminating in a Bachelor's degree or equivalent degree in computer science or engineering and does not meet the terms of the labor certification whether considered for a preference visa classification under section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act as a professional or as a skilled worker under 203(b)(3)(i) of the Act.

Beyond the decision of the director, it is noted that the AAO's request for evidence also directed the petitioner to submit evidence of its ability to pay the proffered wage of $62,000 as of the priority date and continuing to the present. Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2), the evidence must include copies of federal tax returns, audited financial statements or annual reports. As stated above, the ETA Form 9089 indicated that the petitioner employed the beneficiary as of January 2, 2005. The petitioner provided a copy of its 2004 federal income tax return and a copy of a payroll record indicating that the beneficiary's earnings as of December 9, 2005 were $43,145.55. As this salary was $18,854.45 less than the proffered wage and the petitioner failed to respond to the AAO's request for evidence, the petitioner did not establish that it has had the continuing ability to pay the proffered salary. The failure to submit requested evidence that precludes a material line of inquiry shall be grounds for denying the petition. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(14).

An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by the AAO even if the Service Center does not identify all of the grounds for denial in the

initial decision. *See Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 299 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1043 (E.D. Cal. 2001), *aff'd.* 345 F.3d 683 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also Dor v. INS*, 891 F.2d 997, at 1002 n. 9.

The petition will be denied for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for denial. In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

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.