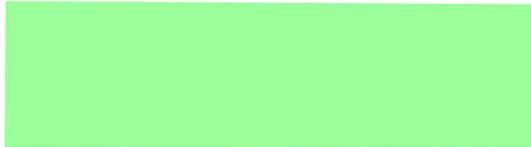


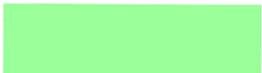


U.S. Citizenship
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Services

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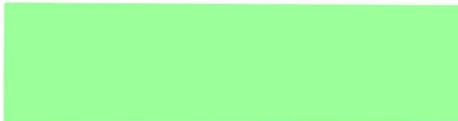
DATE: **MAR 20 2013**

OFFICE: TEXAS SERVICE CENTER FILE: 

IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary: 

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

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

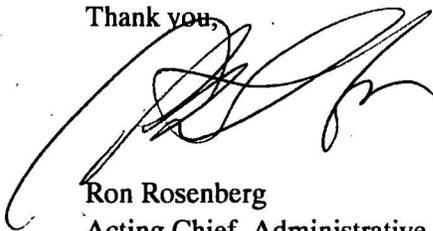


INSTRUCTIONS:

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 AAO inappropriately applied the law in reaching its decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen in accordance with the instructions on Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$630. The specific requirements for filing such a motion can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. **Do not file any motion directly with the AAO.** Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires any motion to be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you,



Ron Rosenberg
Acting Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Texas Service Center, denied the employment-based immigrant visa petition. The petitioner appealed the decision to the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO). The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a software development and consulting firm. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a system analyst. As required by statute, an ETA Form 9089, Application for Permanent Employment Certification, approved by the Department of Labor (DOL), accompanied the petition.¹ Upon reviewing the petition, the director determined that the petitioner failed to demonstrate that the labor certification supported the visa classification sought.

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.²

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.

To be eligible for approval, a beneficiary must have all the education, training, and experience specified on the labor certification as of the petition's priority date. *See Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N 158 (Act. Reg. Comm. 1977). Here, the ETA Form 9089 was accepted for processing on May 7, 2008, which establishes the priority date.³ The Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker (Form I-140) was filed on February 29, 2012.

As noted above, the petitioner seeks a visa classification for the beneficiary as a professional. The proffered position's requirements are found on ETA Form 9089 Part H. This section of the

¹ On March 28, 2005, pursuant to 20 C.F.R. § 656.17, the Application for Permanent Employment Certification, ETA Form 9089 replaced the Application for Alien Employment Certification, Form ETA 750. The new Form ETA 9089 was introduced in connection with the re-engineered permanent foreign labor certification program (PERM), which was published in the Federal Register on December 27, 2004 with an effective date of March 28, 2005. *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 77326 (Dec. 27, 2004).

² The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the Form I-290B, which are incorporated into the regulations by the regulation 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).

³ If the petition is approved, the priority date is also used in conjunction with the Visa Bulletin issued by the Department of State to determine when a beneficiary can apply for adjustment of status or for an immigrant visa abroad. Thus, the importance of reviewing the *bona fides* of a job opportunity as of the priority date is clear.

application for alien labor certification, "Job Opportunity Information," describes the terms and conditions of the job offered. The instructions for the ETA Form 9089, Part H, provide:

Minimum Education, Training, and Experience Required to Perform the Job Duties. Do not duplicate the time requirements. For example, time required in training should not also be listed in education or experience. Indicate whether months or years are required. Do not include restrictive requirements which are not actual business necessities for performance on the job and which would limit consideration of otherwise qualified U.S. workers.

On the ETA Form 9089, the "job offer" position description for a system analyst provides that the applicant will maintain the billing system, initiate collections, analyze and reconcile accounts and prepare bank deposits.

Regarding the minimum level of education and experience required for the proffered position in this matter, Part H of the labor certification reflects the following requirements:

H.4. Education: Minimum level required: Bachelor's degree.

4-B. Major Field Study: Computer Science.

7. Is there an alternate field of study that is acceptable.

The petitioner checked "yes" to this question.

7-A. The petitioner states the alternate field of study is engineering, math or equivalent.

8. Is there an alternate combination of education and experience that is acceptable?

The petitioner checked "yes" to this question.

8-A. If yes, specify the alternate level of education required:

The petitioner states "Other."

8-B. If Other is indicated in question 8-A, indicate the alternate level of education required.

The petitioner states "[C]ombination of Degree and Diploma for four years Equivalent."

8-C. If applicable, indicate the number of years of experience acceptable in question 8.

The petitioner states "2."

9. Is a foreign educational equivalent acceptable?

The petitioner listed "yes" that a foreign educational equivalent would be accepted.

6. Experience: 2 yrs (24 mos.) experience is indicated by the petitioner

10. Is experience in an alternate occupation acceptable?

The petitioner checked "Yes."

10-A. If Yes, number of months experience in alternate occupation required:

The petitioner states "24."

10-B. Identify the job title of the acceptable alternate occupation.

Senior Software Engineer, Programmer Analyst, Systems Engineer, Consult [remainder unreadable].

14. Specific skills or other requirements-If submitting by mail, add attachment if necessary. Skills description must begin in this space.

The petitioner states:

Bachelors Degree in Computer Science, Engineering or Math plus Two years experience or Equivalent* (*Combination of Degree & Diploma equivalent to Four years degree).

To determine whether a beneficiary is eligible for a preference immigrant visa, U.S. 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).

At the outset, it is noted that section 212(a)(5)(A)(i) of the Act and the scope of the regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 656.1(a) describe the role of the DOL in the labor certification process as follows:

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.

It is left to USCIS to determine whether the proffered position and alien qualify 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).⁴ *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).⁵

⁴ Based on revisions to the Act, the current citation is section 212(a)(5)(A) as set forth above.

⁵ The Ninth Circuit, citing *K.R.K. Irvine, Inc.*, 699 F.2d at 1006, has stated:

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

In 1991, when the final rule for 8 C.F.R. § 204.5 was published in the Federal Register, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now USCIS or 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: "[B]oth 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 (November 29, 1991)(emphasis added).

Moreover, 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." (Emphasis added.) It is significant that both the statute, section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act, and relevant regulations use the word "degree" in relation to professionals. A statute should be construed under the assumption that Congress intended it to have purpose and meaningful effect. *Mountain States Tel. & Tel. v. Pueblo of Santa Ana*, 472 U.S. 237, 249 (1985); *Sutton v. United States*, 819 F.2d 1289, 1295 (5th Cir. 1987). It can be presumed that Congress' narrow requirement of a "degree" for members of the professions is deliberate. Significantly, in another context, Congress has broadly referenced "the possession of a degree, diploma, certificate, or similar award from a college, university, school, or other institution of learning." Section 203(b)(2)(C) (relating to aliens of exceptional ability). Thus, the requirement at section 203(b)(3)(A)(ii) that an eligible alien both have a baccalaureate "degree" and be a member of the professions reveals that member of the profession must have a *degree* and that a diploma or certificate from an institution of learning other than a college or university is a potentially similar but distinct type of credential. Thus, even if we did not require "a" degree that is the foreign equivalent of a U.S. baccalaureate, we could not consider education earned at an institution other than a college or university, and which would also include work experience deemed to equate to an academic equivalency.

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

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).

specifically, a three-year bachelor's degree will not be considered to be the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. 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 single-source "foreign equivalent degree." In order to have experience and education equating to a bachelor's degree 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.

It is noted that the director's denial is not based upon whether the beneficiary possesses the credentials required by the ETA Form 9089, but whether these requirements are the minimum requirements for a professional third preference visa classification that was designated by the petitioner on the Form I-140. As noted by the director, the labor certification must support the visa classification sought.

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 regulation uses a singular description of foreign equivalent degree. 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. Likewise, the proffered position as set forth on the ETA Form 9089 must also show that the minimum requirement for entry is a baccalaureate degree. Additionally, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(i) specifically provides that the "job offer portion of an individual labor certification, Schedule A application, or Pilot Program application for a professional must demonstrate that the job requires the minimum of a baccalaureate degree."

The petitioner seeks a professional visa classification on the Form I-140. However, the minimum requirements listed in Part H of the ETA Form 9089 indicate that the minimum requirements can be satisfied by someone with a combination of degrees or diplomas that are the "equivalent of a four years degree" rather than a single-source "foreign equivalent" to a U.S. bachelor's degree. Therefore, since the minimum requirements are not a Bachelor's degree but the requirement as set forth in H.14, the labor certification does not support a visa designation selection on the Form I-140 as a professional.

On appeal, counsel asserts that the requirements do not change the Bachelor's degree requirement and

submits copies of letters dated January 7, 2003 and July 23, 2003, respectively, from Efrén Hernández III, of the INS Office of Adjudications to counsel in other cases, expressing his opinion about the possible means to satisfy the requirement of a foreign equivalent of a U.S. advanced degree for purposes of 8 C.F.R. 204.5(k)(2). Counsel also offers a copy of a letter, dated July 10, 2007, from [REDACTED] that appears to relate to another case and opines that an Indian three-year undergraduate degree, standing alone, is equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree. With respect to the Hernández letters, it is noted that private discussions and correspondence solicited to obtain advice from USCIS, such as Mr. Hernández' letter, are not binding on the AAO or other USCIS adjudicators and do not have the force of law. *Matter of Izummi*, 22 I&N 169, 196-197 (Comm. 1968); *see also*, Memorandum from Thomas Cook, Acting Associate Commissioner, Office of Programs, U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Service, *Significance of Letters Drafted By the Office of Adjudications* (December 7, 2000). Moreover, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(C) is clear in allowing only for the equivalency of one foreign degree to a United States baccalaureate, not a combination of degrees, diplomas or employment experience.

With respect to [REDACTED] letter, it is noted that it is unaccompanied by his resume or any confirmation that he is regarded as an expert on both the Indian or U.S. educational systems. Further, even the petitioner's labor certification requirements set forth at H.14 appear to recognize that a three-year degree alone may not be equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's, but requires a combination of a degree and diploma to reach a four-year equivalency. USCIS may, in its discretion, use as advisory opinions statements submitted as expert testimony. *See Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791, 795 (Comm. 1988). However, USCIS is ultimately responsible for making the final determination regarding an alien's eligibility for the benefit sought. *Id.* USCIS may 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 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).⁶

⁶ The AAO reviews the Electronic Database for Global Education (EDGE) created by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) with regard to the U.S. equivalency of foreign educational systems. According to its website, "AACRAO is a nonprofit, voluntary, professional association of more than 11,000 higher education admissions and registration professionals who represent more than 2,600 institutions and agencies in the United States and in over 40 countries around the world." Authors for EDGE must work with a publication consultant and a Council Liaison with AACRAO's National Council on the Evaluation of Foreign Educational Credentials. 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,

It remains that the minimum educational requirements set forth by the petitioner on the labor certification do not support the visa designation of professional made by the petitioner on the Form I-140. The appeal will be dismissed on this basis.

Beyond the decision of the director, the record does not establish that the beneficiary possesses the required two years of experience as set forth in the ETA Form 9089. The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3) provides:

(ii) *Other documentation—*

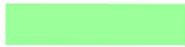
(A) *General.* Any requirements of training or experience for skilled workers, professionals, or other workers must be supported by letters from trainers or employers giving the name, address, and title of the trainer or employer, and a description of the training received or the experience of the alien.

The only employment verification letter of the beneficiary's experience submitted by the petitioner is one from [REDACTED], a colleague of the beneficiary's at the firm of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] describes the beneficiary's position at that firm and his job duties during a specified period of time but does not identify himself as the beneficiary's trainer or employer, but rather as a co-worker. As such, the letter cannot be considered to comply with the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii) as set forth above, which requires a trainer or employer verification. The petitioner has not established that the beneficiary possessed the required experience as of the priority date of May 7, 2008.

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 Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004) (recognizing AAO *de novo* authority).

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.

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. The court also noted that the labor certification itself required a degree and did not allow for the combination of education and experience.



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ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.