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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
Washington, DC 20529-2090

U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

DATE: **AUG 21 2014**

OFFICE: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

FILE: [REDACTED]

IN RE:

Petitioner:

Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

PETITION: Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker Pursuant to Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) in your case.

This is a non-precedent decision. The AAO does not announce new constructions of law nor establish agency policy through non-precedent decisions. If you believe the AAO incorrectly applied current law or policy to your case or if you seek to present new facts for consideration, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen, respectively. Any motion must be filed on a Notice of Appeal or Motion (Form I-290B) within 33 days of the date of this decision. **Please review the Form I-290B instructions at <http://www.uscis.gov/forms> for the latest information on fee, filing location, and other requirements. See also 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. Do not file a motion directly with the AAO.**

Thank you,

Ron Rosenberg
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The service center director denied the nonimmigrant visa petition. The matter is now on appeal before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO). The appeal will be dismissed. The petition will be denied.

The petitioner submitted a Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) to the Vermont Service Center on September 6, 2012. In the Form I-129 visa petition, the petitioner describes itself as a retail business established in 2010. In order to employ the beneficiary in what it designates as an accountant position, the petitioner seeks to classify the beneficiary as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

The director denied the petition on May 16, 2013, finding that the petitioner failed to establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation in accordance with the applicable statutory and regulatory provisions. On appeal, counsel asserts that the director's basis for denial of the petition was erroneous and contends that the petitioner satisfied all evidentiary requirements. Counsel submitted a brief and additional documents in support of this assertion.

The record of proceeding before us contains: (1) the petitioner's Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner's response to the RFE; (4) the director's denial letter; and (5) the Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, and supporting documentation. We reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing our decision.¹

For the reasons that will be discussed below, we agree with the director that the petitioner has not established eligibility for the benefit sought. Accordingly, the director's decision will not be disturbed. The appeal will be dismissed, and the petition will be denied.

We will also discuss two additional, independent grounds, not identified by the director's decision, that we find also preclude approval of this petition. Specifically, beyond the decision of the director, we find that the petitioner (1) failed to establish that it would pay an adequate salary for the beneficiary's work, as required under the applicable statutory and regulatory provisions; and (2) failed to submit a Labor Condition Application (LCA) that corresponds to the petition.

I. FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

In this matter, the petitioner stated in the Form I-129 petition that it seeks the beneficiary's services as an accountant to work on a full-time basis at an annual salary of \$44,595. In a support letter dated August 24, 2012, the petitioner stated that the following regarding the proffered position:

¹ We conduct appellate review on a *de novo* basis. See *Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004).

Job Duties

In this position, [the beneficiary's] specific duties will include: (i) compiling and analyzing financial information and preparing financial reports by applying principles of generally accepted accounting standards; (ii) preparing entries and reconciling general ledger accounts, documenting transactions, and summarizing current and projected financial position; (iii) maintaining payable and receivable records, detailing assets, liabilities, capital, and preparing detailed balance sheet, profit & loss, and cash flow statement; (iv) auditing orders, contracts, individual transactions and preparing depreciation schedules to apply to capital assets; (v) preparing compliance reports for taxing authorities; (vi) reconciling cash and sales reports, prepare cash flow statements and deposits and (vi[i]) analyzing operating statements, review cost control programs, and make strategy recommendations to management.

Minimum Job Requirements

Due to the complex and demanding requirements of the position of an Accountant, only a person of exceptional ability and skills in business administration is capable of qualifying as an Accountant for [the petitioner]. These minimum prerequisites for the offered position require a skilled professional with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Accounting, or a related field.

The petitioner indicated that the beneficiary is qualified to perform services in the proffered position by virtue of his foreign education and professional experience. The petitioner provided an evaluation of the beneficiary's credentials prepared by [REDACTED] which states that, based on the beneficiary's education and work experience, the beneficiary has attained the equivalent of a Bachelor of Business Administration. Copies of the beneficiary's foreign transcripts and letters regarding the beneficiary's prior work experience accompany the evaluation.

In addition, the petitioner submitted an LCA in support of the instant H-1B petition. We note that the LCA designation for the proffered position corresponds to the occupational classification "Accountants and Auditors" - SOC (ONET/OES) code 13-2011, at a Level I (entry level) wage.

The director found the initial evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought, and issued an RFE on January 17, 2013. We note that the director specifically asked the petitioner to provide evidence to establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. On April 16, 2013, counsel responded to the director's RFE by providing a brief and additional evidence, including: (1) corporate documents; (2) tax documents; (3) several invoices; (4) various permits and licenses in the name of the petitioner; (5) an excerpt from the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)* regarding "Accountants and Auditors"; (6) a printout of the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) OnLine Summary Report for the occupation "Accountants"; (7) copies of the petitioner's bank statements for March through

December 2012; (8) copies of several job postings;² (9) Forms W-2, Wage and Tax Statements, for 2009 through 2012 issued by the petitioner to the beneficiary; (10) copies of four checks in the name of the beneficiary; (11) a copy of a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) memorandum dated April 23, 2004; and (12) copies of previously submitted documents.

We observe that counsel provided a revised description of the duties of the proffered position, along with the approximate percentage of time that the beneficiary will spend performing each duty.³

The director reviewed the information provided in the initial H-1B petition and in response to the RFE. Although the petitioner and counsel claimed that the beneficiary would serve in a specialty occupation, the director determined that the petitioner failed to establish how the beneficiary's immediate duties would necessitate services at a level requiring the theoretical and practical application of at least a bachelor's degree level of a body of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. The director denied the petition on July 26, 2013. Counsel for the petitioner submitted an appeal of the denial of the H-1B petition. In support of the appeal, counsel submitted a brief and additional evidence.

II. MATERIAL FINDINGS

The issue before us is whether the petitioner has provided sufficient evidence to establish that it will employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. Based upon a complete review of the record of proceeding, we will make some preliminary findings that are material to the determination of the merits of this appeal.

² We observe that some of the job announcements the petitioner provided are poor quality photocopies of the job announcements and are partially or completely illegible. We will not attempt to decipher or "guess" the meaning or probative value of illegible documents.

³ In response to the RFE, counsel provided a letter on the law firm's letterhead which includes a revised description of the proffered position. It is noted that the revised job description provided by counsel is not probative evidence. The description was submitted by counsel, not the petitioner, and counsel's brief was not endorsed by the petitioner. The record of proceeding does not indicate the source of the expanded duties and responsibilities (and the percentages of time allocated to each duty) that counsel attributes to the proffered position. Without documentary evidence to support the claim, the assertions of counsel will not satisfy the petitioner's burden of proof. The unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. 1 (BIA 1983); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980).

Moreover, the expanded description provided by counsel describes duties common to the occupational category rather than the specific duties of this particular position (i.e., "[c]ommon duties for accountants..."; "[t]hey monitor..."; "[t]heir duties..."; "[a]ccountants are responsible . . ."; "[t]he majority of an accountant's day is spent . . ."; "[t]hese managers and supervisors oversee . . ."; "[t]hey must oversee all aspects of the accounting department . . .").

A. Description of Duties of the Proffered Position

To ascertain the intent of a petitioner, USCIS must look to the Form I-129 and the documents filed in support of the petition. It is only in this manner that the agency can determine the exact position offered, the location of employment, the proffered wage, et cetera. Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(9)(i), the director has the responsibility to consider all of the evidence submitted by a petitioner and such other evidence that he or she may independently require to assist his or her adjudication. Further, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iv) provides that "[a]n H-1B petition involving a specialty occupation shall be accompanied by [d]ocumentation . . . or any other required evidence sufficient to establish . . . that the services the beneficiary is to perform are in a specialty occupation."

Thus, a crucial aspect of this matter is whether the petitioner has adequately described the duties of the proffered position, such that USCIS may discern the nature of the position and whether the position indeed requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge attained through attainment of at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific discipline. We find that the petitioner has not done so here.

We note that the petitioner has described the duties of the beneficiary's employment in the same general terms as those used from various sources on the Internet, including excerpts from the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*. That is, we observe that the wording of the duties, as stated by the petitioner, is recited almost verbatim from other sources. This type of description may be appropriate when defining the range of duties that may be performed within an occupational category, but fails to adequately convey the substantive work that the beneficiary will perform within the petitioner's business operations. Therefore, such general descriptions cannot be relied upon by a petitioner when discussing the duties attached to specific employment for H-1B approval. In establishing a position as a specialty occupation, a petitioner must describe the specific duties and responsibilities to be performed by a beneficiary, demonstrate a legitimate need for an employee exists, and substantiate that it has H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary for the period of employment requested in the petition.

Further, we find that the petitioner did not provide any information with regard to the order of importance and/or frequency of occurrence with which the beneficiary will perform the functions and tasks. Thus, the petitioner failed to specify which tasks were major functions of the proffered position and it did not establish the frequency with which each of the duties would be performed (e.g., regularly, periodically or at irregular intervals). As a result, the petitioner did not establish the primary and essential functions of the proffered position.

Thus, we find that the generalized functions described by the petitioner fail to convey sufficient substantive information to establish the relative complexity, uniqueness and/or specialization of the proffered position or its duties. The abstract level of information provided about the proffered position and its constituent duties is exemplified by the petitioner's assertion that the beneficiary will be responsible for "compiling and analyzing financial information and preparing financial reports." The statement fails to provide any insight into the beneficiary's actual duties, nor does it

include any information regarding the specific tasks that the beneficiary will perform. Additionally, the petitioner claims that the beneficiary will be responsible for "preparing entries and reconciling general ledger accounts, documenting transactions, and summarizing current and projected financial position." Notably, the petitioner fails to demonstrate how the performance of these duties, as described in the record, would require the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

The petitioner further claims that the beneficiary will be responsible for "preparing compliance reports for taxing authorities" and "analyzing operating statements, review cost control programs, and make strategy recommendations to management." Again, the petitioner's statements fail to convey any pertinent details as to the actual work involved in these tasks. The petitioner does not explain the beneficiary's specific role and how his work will be conducted and/or applied within the scope of the petitioner's business operations. Furthermore, the petitioner fails to convey how a baccalaureate level of education (or higher) in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, would be required to perform these tasks. Thus, the overall responsibilities for the proffered position contain generalized functions without providing sufficient information regarding the particular work, and associated educational requirements, into which the duties would manifest themselves in their day-to-day performance within the petitioner's business operations.

In the instant case, the petitioner claims that the beneficiary has served in the proffered position since 2009; however, the petitioner failed to provide sufficient details regarding the nature and scope of the beneficiary's employment or substantive evidence regarding the actual work that the beneficiary performs.

Furthermore, we note that it is reasonable to assume that the size of an employer's business has or could have an impact on the duties of a particular position. *See EG Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a/ Mexican Wholesale Grocery v Department of Homeland Security*, 467 F. Supp. 2d 728 (E.D. Mich. 2006). Thus, the size of a petitioner may be considered as a component of the nature of the petitioner's business, as the size impacts upon the duties of a particular position.⁴ In matters where a petitioner's business is relatively small, we review the record for evidence that its operations, are, nevertheless, of sufficient complexity to indicate that it would employ the beneficiary in position requiring the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge that may be obtained only through a baccalaureate degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Additionally, when a petitioner employs relatively few people, it may be necessary for the petitioner to establish how the beneficiary will be relieved from performing non-qualifying duties. The petitioner and counsel elected not to address or provide probative documentation as to how the beneficiary will be relieved from performing non-qualifying duties. Further, the record of proceeding does not contain the job titles and job descriptions of the petitioner's other employees.

It is not evident that the proposed duties as described in this record of proceeding, and the position that they comprise, merit recognition of the proffered position as a specialty occupation. To the

⁴ In the instant case, the petitioner stated on the Form I-129 petition that it employs three people.

extent that they are described, the proposed duties do not provide a sufficient factual basis for conveying the substantive matters that would engage the beneficiary in the actual performance of the proffered position for the entire three-year period requested. The proposed duties as described do not persuasively support the claim that the position's actual work would require the theoretical and practical application of any particular educational level of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the proffered position.

B. Academic Requirements for the Proffered Position

We observe that the academic requirement identified by the petitioner as the minimum education necessary to perform services in the proffered position does not qualify the position as a specialty occupation. Specifically, the petitioner stated that the duties of the proffered position require an individual with a bachelor's degree in business administration, accounting, or a related field. To qualify as a specialty occupation, a petitioner must demonstrate that the proffered position requires a precise and specific course of study that relates directly to the duties and responsibilities of the position in question. Since there must be a close correlation between the required specialized studies and the position, the requirement of a general-purpose degree (or a degree with a generalized title such as business administration, without further specification) does not establish the position as a specialty occupation. *Cf. Matter of Michael Hertz Associates*, 19 I&N Dec. 558 (Comm'r 1988).

To demonstrate that a job requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge as required by section 214(i)(1) of the Act, a petitioner must establish that the position requires the attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specialized field of study or its equivalent. USCIS interprets the degree requirement at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to require a degree in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proposed position. Although a general-purpose degree (including a degree in business administration) may be a legitimate prerequisite for a particular position, requiring such a degree, without more, will not justify a finding that a particular position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation. *See Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d 139, 147 (1st Cir. 2007).⁵ The petitioner's assertions that a general

⁵ Specifically, the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit explained in *Royal Siam* that:

[t]he courts and the agency consistently have stated that, although a general-purpose bachelor's degree, such as a business administration degree, may be a legitimate prerequisite for a particular position, requiring such a degree, without more, will not justify the granting of a petition for an H-1B specialty occupation visa. *See, e.g., Tapis Int'l v. INS*, 94 F.Supp.2d 172, 175-76 (D.Mass.2000); *Shanti*, 36 F. Supp.2d at 1164-66; *cf. Matter of Michael Hertz Assocs.*, 19 I & N Dec. 558, 560 ([Comm'r] 1988) (providing frequently cited analysis in connection with a conceptually similar provision). This is as it should be: otherwise, an employer could ensure the granting of a specialty occupation visa petition by the simple expedient of creating a generic (and essentially artificial) degree requirement.

purpose degree is sufficient to perform the duties of the position indicate that the proffered position is not in fact a specialty occupation.

C. Discrepancies in the Record

We observe that the record of proceeding contains inconsistencies that call into question the veracity of the petitioner's statements. Specifically, we note that the duties of the proffered position, as described by the petitioner, state that the beneficiary will be responsible for "preparing compliance reports for taxing authorities." The record reflects that the beneficiary has been employed in the proffered position since 2009. However, the 2011 tax return provided by the petitioner was prepared by [REDACTED]. Neither the petitioner nor counsel has explained why an outside accounting service was required to prepare the petitioner's taxes while the petitioner employed a full-time accountant.

In addition, we observe that the petitioner has indicated that it intends to pay the beneficiary an annual salary of \$44,595, which is the prevailing wage for a Level I accountant in [REDACTED] Texas for the relevant period.⁶ However, the evidence of record calls into question the veracity of this claim. The petitioner's 2011 tax return states that the petitioner paid a total of \$45,950 in salaries and wages during 2011. In the Form I-129, the petitioner stated that it employs 3 individuals. The petitioner provided a Form W-2 in the name of the beneficiary indicating that it paid the beneficiary \$31,550 in 2011. We observe that this amount is below the prevailing wage that the petitioner previously agreed to pay the beneficiary.⁷ We further observe that if the petitioner paid the beneficiary \$31,550 in 2011, it paid the balance of its employees a total of \$14,400. It is not apparent how with that sum of money the petitioner could employ sufficient staff to relieve the beneficiary of non-qualifying duties.⁸ The evidence provided casts doubt on the legitimacy of the petitioner's statements regarding the salary it intends to pay the beneficiary. It further calls into question whether the petitioner is able to employ sufficient additional staff to relieve the beneficiary from non-qualifying duties.

⁶ For additional information regarding the prevailing wage for accountants in [REDACTED] see the All Industries Database for 7/2012 - 6/2013 for Accountants and Auditors at the Foreign Labor Certification Data Center, Online Wage Library on the Internet at [http://www.flcdatabase.com/OesQuickResults.aspx?code=13-2011&area=\[REDACTED\]&year=13&source=1](http://www.flcdatabase.com/OesQuickResults.aspx?code=13-2011&area=[REDACTED]&year=13&source=1) (last visited August 15, 2014).

⁷ In response to the RFE, counsel indicated that the petitioner is a successor-in-interest to the company that filed the previous Form I-129 petition for the beneficiary.

⁸ We note that the bank statements provided by the petitioner reflect paychecks for only one other employee: [REDACTED]. This individual appears to earn in take-home pay of \$554.10 every two weeks. The bank statements reflect that between March 1 and December 31, 2012, the beneficiary was issued checks in the amount of \$2,600 on a monthly basis.

D. Adequacy of the LCA

In the instant case, the record of proceeding also contains discrepancies between what the petitioner claims about the level of responsibility inherent in the proffered position set against the contrary level of responsibility conveyed by the wage level indicated by the LCA submitted in support of petition. As previously noted, the petitioner submitted an LCA in support of the petition that designated the proffered position to the corresponding occupational category of "Accountants and Auditors" - SOC (ONET/OES) code 13-2011. The wage level for the proffered position in the LCA corresponds to a Level I (entry) position. The prevailing wage source is listed in the LCA as the OES (Occupational Employment Statistics) OFLC (Office of Foreign Labor Certification) Online Data Center.⁹ The LCA was certified on August 17, 2012 and signed by the petitioner. We note that by completing and submitting the LCA, and by signing the LCA, the petitioner attested that the information contained in the LCA was true and accurate.

Wage levels should be determined only after selecting the most relevant O*NET code classification. Then, a prevailing wage determination is made by selecting one of four wage levels for an occupation based on a comparison of the employer's job requirements to the occupational requirements, including tasks, knowledge, skills, and specific vocational preparation (education, training and experience) generally required for acceptable performance in that occupation.¹⁰

Prevailing wage determinations start with a Level I (entry) and progress to a wage that is commensurate with that of a Level II (qualified), Level III (experienced), or Level IV (fully competent) position after considering the job requirements, experience, education, special skills/other requirements and supervisory duties. Factors to be considered when determining the prevailing wage level for a position include the complexity of the job duties, the level of judgment, the amount and level of supervision, and the level of understanding required to perform the job duties.¹¹ DOL emphasizes that these guidelines should not be implemented in a mechanical fashion

⁹ The Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program produces employment and wage estimates for over 800 occupations. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oes/>. The OES All Industries Database is available at the Office of Foreign Labor Certification (OFLC) Data Center, which includes the Online Wage Library for prevailing wage determinations and the disclosure databases for the temporary and permanent programs. The Online Wage Library is accessible at <http://www.flcdatacenter.com/>.

¹⁰ For additional information regarding prevailing wage determinations, see U.S. Dep't of Labor, Emp't & Training Admin., *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagric. Immigration Programs (rev. Nov. 2009), available at http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf.

¹¹ A point system is used to assess the complexity of the job and assign the wage level. Step 1 requires a "1" to represent the job's requirements. Step 2 addresses experience and must contain a "0" (for at or below the level of experience and SVP range), a "1" (low end of experience and SVP), a "2" (high end), or "3" (greater than range). Step 3 considers education required to perform the job duties, a "1" (more than the usual education by one category) or "2" (more than the usual education by more than one category). Step 4

and that the wage level should be commensurate with the complexity of the tasks, independent judgment required, and amount of close supervision received.

The wage levels are defined in DOL's "Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance." A Level I wage rate is described as follows:

Level I (entry) wage rates are assigned to job offers for beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation. These employees perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. The tasks provide experience and familiarization with the employer's methods, practices, and programs. The employees may perform higher level work for training and developmental purposes. These employees work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required tasks and results expected. Their work is closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy. Statements that the job offer is for a research fellow, a worker in training, or an internship are indicators that a Level I wage should be considered.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Emp't & Training Admin., *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagric. Immigration Programs (rev. Nov. 2009), available at http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf.

We acknowledge that the petitioner and its counsel may believe that the duties of the proffered position are complex, unique and/or specialized. For instance, we note that in the August 24, 2012 letter of support, the petitioner references the "complex and demanding requirements of the position" and claims that "only a person of exceptional ability and skills in business administration is capable of qualifying as an Accountant for [the petitioner]."

Moreover, in his April 12, 2013 letter, submitted in response to the director's RFE, counsel claimed that the specific responsibilities and knowledge for the position is "specialized" and "complex." Further, counsel referenced "the complexity of the voluminous transactions taking place [in the petitioning company]." Additionally, counsel claimed that the beneficiary's "responsibilities primarily include managing and directing the financial activities, rather than performing day-to-day bookkeeping function." Counsel also stated, "In addition to supervising individuals who perform routine bookkeeping services, [the beneficiary] will spend a bulk of his time in establishing operational and financial security procedures and advising upper management with cost saving and investment strategies."¹²

accounts for Special Skills requirements that indicate a higher level of complexity or decision-making with a "1" or a "2" entered as appropriate. Finally, Step 5 addresses Supervisory Duties, with a "1" entered unless supervision is generally required by the occupation.

¹² The Form I-129 indicates that the petitioner's business operations consist of three employees. No specific information was provided as to the identity or positions of the "individuals who perform routine bookkeeping services" that the beneficiary will purportedly supervise.

On appeal, counsel asserts that the beneficiary's "job will coordinate activities involved with management of the entire financial operation." According to counsel, the petitioner seeks new opportunities and it "fears that it may not be able to meet the aggressive goals without assistance of an Accountant." Counsel states that the beneficiary "will have overall responsibility for developing, organizing, and managing the financial operations of [the petitioner]." Counsel further reports that the beneficiary "would be spending the majority of his time in preparing, reviewing, and evaluating financial and tax records, implementing cost management techniques, and advising management in financial investment decisions to contribute to the financial success of [the petitioner]." Counsel notes that it is "critical asset" for business to be able to hire "an individual who can carry out the responsibility of the position with little or no supervision," and further notes that the petitioner is "largely dependent on the ability and expertise of an Accountant . . . as the specialized duties of this individual directly and indirectly affect the company's operations, revenue and profits, and ultimately the overall success of the company."

We observe that the petitioner and counsel indicate that the petitioner will be relying heavily on the beneficiary to make critical decisions regarding the petitioner's business. Such reliance on the beneficiary's work appears to surpass the expectations of a Level I position, as described above, in which the employee works under close supervision, performing routine tasks that require only a basic understanding of the occupation and has limited exercise of judgment. Here, rather than the beneficiary's work being "monitored and reviewed for accuracy," counsel indicates that the beneficiary will be supervising others and claims that the petitioner is relying on the beneficiary services to ensure the growth and success of the petitioner's business.

Thus, upon review of the assertions made by the petitioner and counsel, we must question the level of complexity, independent judgment and understanding actually required for the proffered position as the LCA is certified for a Level I entry-level position. This characterization of the position and the claimed duties and responsibilities as described in the record of proceeding conflict with the wage-rate element of the LCA selected by the petitioner, which, as reflected in the discussion above, is indicative of a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within the occupation.

Under the H-1B program, a petitioner must offer a beneficiary wages that are at least the actual wage level paid by the petitioner to all other individuals with similar experience and qualifications for the specific employment in question, or the prevailing wage level for the occupational classification in the area of employment, whichever is greater, based on the best information available as of the time of filing the application. See section 212(n)(1)(A) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1)(A).

We note that the prevailing wage of \$44,595 per year on the LCA corresponds to a Level I for the occupational category of "Accountants and Auditors" for [redacted] Texas).¹³ The

¹³ For additional information regarding the prevailing wage for accountants in [redacted] see the All Industries Database for 7/2012 - 6/2013 for Accountants and Auditors at the Foreign Labor Certification Data Center, Online Wage Library on the Internet at

petitioner stated in the Form I-129 petition and LCA that the offered salary for the proffered position was \$44,595 per year. Notably, if the proffered position were designated as a higher level position, the prevailing wage at that time would have been \$59,446 per year for a Level II position, \$74,298 per year for a Level III position, and \$89,149 per year for a Level IV position.

The petitioner was required to provide, at the time of filing the H-1B petition, a LCA certified for the correct wage level in order for it to be found to correspond to the petition. To permit otherwise would result in a petitioner paying a wage lower than that required by section 212(n)(1)(A) of the Act. As such, the petitioner has failed to establish that it would pay an adequate salary for the beneficiary's work, as required under the Act, if the petition were granted. Thus, even if it were determined that the petitioner overcame the director's ground for denying the petition (which it has not), for this additional reason the H-1B petition cannot be approved. It is considered an independent and alternative basis for denial.

We note that this aspect of the LCA undermines the credibility of the petition, and, in particular, the credibility of the petitioner's assertions regarding the demands, level of responsibilities and requirements of the proffered position. It is incumbent upon the petitioner to resolve any inconsistencies in the record by independent objective evidence. Any attempt to explain or reconcile such inconsistencies will not suffice unless the petitioner submits competent objective evidence pointing to where the truth lies. *Matter of Ho*, 19 I&N Dec. 582, 591-92 (BIA 1988).

As noted below, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(i)(B)(2) specifies that certification of an LCA does not constitute a determination that an occupation is a specialty occupation:

Certification by the Department of Labor of a labor condition application in an occupational classification does not constitute a determination by that agency that the occupation in question is a specialty occupation. The director shall determine if the application involves a specialty occupation as defined in section 214(i)(1) of the Act. The director shall also determine whether the particular alien for whom H-1B classification is sought qualifies to perform services in the specialty occupation as prescribed in section 214(i)(2) of the Act.

While DOL is the agency that certifies LCA applications before they are submitted to USCIS, DOL regulations note that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (i.e., its immigration benefits branch, USCIS) is the department responsible for determining whether an LCA filed for a particular Form I-129 actually supports that petition. See 20 C.F.R. § 655.705(b), which states, in pertinent part (emphasis added):

For H-1B visas . . . DHS accepts the employer's petition (DHS Form I-129) with the DOL certified LCA attached. *In doing so, the DHS determines whether the petition is supported by an LCA which corresponds with the petition*, whether the occupation

named in the [LCA] is a specialty occupation . . . and whether the qualifications of the nonimmigrant meet the statutory requirements of H-1B visa classification.

The regulation at 20 C.F.R. § 655.705(b) requires that USCIS ensure that an LCA actually supports the H-1B petition filed on behalf of the beneficiary. Here, the petitioner has failed to submit a valid LCA that corresponds to the claimed duties and requirements of the proffered position, that is, specifically, that corresponds to the level of work, responsibilities and requirements that the petitioner ascribed to the proffered position and to the wage-level corresponding to such a level of work, responsibilities and requirements in accordance with the pertinent LCA regulations.

The statements regarding the claimed level of complexity, independent judgment and knowledge required for the proffered position, along with the petitioner's claimed requirements, are materially inconsistent with the certification of the LCA for a Level I entry-level position. This conflict undermines the overall credibility of the petition. We find that, fully considered in the context of the entire record of proceedings, the petitioner failed to establish the nature of the proffered position and in what capacity the beneficiary will actually be employed.

For the foregoing reasons, a review of the enclosed LCA indicates that the information provided does not correspond to the level of work and requirements that the petitioner ascribed to the proffered position and to the wage-level corresponding to such a level of work and requirements in accordance with the pertinent LCA regulations. As a result, even if it were determined that the petitioner overcame the for the director's basis for denial of the petition, the petition could still not be approved.

III. SPECIALTY OCCUPATION

We will now address the director's basis for denial of the petition, namely that the petitioner failed to establish that it would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. Based upon a complete review of the record of proceeding, and for the specific reasons described below, we agree with the director and find that the evidence fails to establish that the position as described constitutes a specialty occupation.

For an H-1B petition to be granted, the petitioner must provide sufficient evidence to establish that it will employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. To meet its burden of proof in this regard, the petitioner must establish that the employment it is offering to the beneficiary meets the applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

Section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and

- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) states, in pertinent part, the following:

Specialty occupation means an occupation which [(1)] requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which [(2)] requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, a proposed position must also meet one of the following criteria:

- (1) A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position;
- (2) The degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or, in the alternative, an employer may show that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree;
- (3) The employer normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position; or
- (4) The nature of the specific duties [is] so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree.

As a threshold issue, it is noted that 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must logically be read together with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). In other words, this regulatory language must be construed in harmony with the thrust of the related provisions and with the statute as a whole. *See K Mart Corp. v. Cartier, Inc.*, 486 U.S. 281, 291 (1988) (holding that construction of language which takes into account the design of the statute as a whole is preferred); *see also COIT Independence Joint Venture v. Federal Sav. and Loan Ins. Corp.*, 489 U.S. 561 (1989); *Matter of W-F-*, 21 I&N Dec. 503 (BIA 1996). As such, the criteria stated in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) should logically be read as being necessary but not necessarily sufficient to meet the statutory and regulatory definition of specialty occupation. To otherwise interpret this section as stating the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for meeting the definition of specialty occupation would result in particular positions meeting a condition under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) but not the statutory or regulatory definition. *See Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 387 (5th Cir. 2000). To avoid this result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be

read as providing supplemental criteria that must be met in accordance with, and not as alternatives to, the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

As such and consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), USCIS consistently interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proffered position. *See Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d 139, 147 (1st Cir. 2007) (describing "a degree requirement in a specific specialty" as "one that relates directly to the duties and responsibilities of a particular position"). Applying this standard, USCIS regularly approves H-1B petitions for qualified aliens who are to be employed as engineers, computer scientists, certified public accountants, college professors, and other such occupations. These professions, for which petitioners have regularly been able to establish a minimum entry requirement in the United States of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the particular position, fairly represent the types of specialty occupations that Congress contemplated when it created the H-1B visa category.

To determine whether a particular job qualifies as a specialty occupation, USCIS does not simply rely on a position's title. The specific duties of the proffered position, combined with the nature of the petitioning entity's business operations, are factors to be considered. USCIS must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *See generally Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384. The critical element is not the title of the position nor an employer's self-imposed standards, but whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation, as required by the Act.

In the instant case, the petitioner has failed to establish the nature of the proffered position and in what capacity the beneficiary will actually be employed. The petitioner's failure to establish the substantive nature of the work to be performed by the beneficiary precludes a finding that the proffered position satisfies any criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), because it is the substantive nature of that work that determines (1) the normal minimum educational requirement for the particular position, which is the focus of criterion 1; (2) industry positions which are parallel to the proffered position and thus appropriate for review for a common degree requirement, under the first alternate prong of criterion 2; (3) the level of complexity or uniqueness of the proffered position, which is the focus of the second alternate prong of criterion 2; (4) the factual justification for a petitioner normally requiring a degree or its equivalent, when that is an issue under criterion 3; and (5) the degree of specialization and complexity of the specific duties, which is the focus of criterion 4. Nevertheless, we will now address in detail the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

Assuming, *arguendo*, that the duties of the proffered position as described by the petitioner would in fact be the duties performed by the beneficiary, we will continue our discussion regarding the duties and the evidence in the record of proceeding to determine whether the proffered position as described would qualify as a specialty occupation in relation to the criterion at 8 C.F.R.

§ 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(I). This criterion requires that the petitioner establish that a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position.

We recognize the *Handbook* as an authoritative source on the duties and educational requirements of the wide variety of occupations that it addresses.¹⁴ As previously discussed, the petitioner designated the proffered position in the LCA under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors."

In the instant case, we find that the petitioner has not provided sufficient information to establish that the proffered position falls under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors." Nevertheless, we reviewed the chapter of the *Handbook* entitled "Accountants and Auditors" including the sections regarding the typical duties and requirements for this occupational category. However, the *Handbook* does not indicate that "Accountants and Auditors" comprise an occupational group for which at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation.

When reviewing the *Handbook*, we must note that the petitioner designated the proffered position as a Level I (entry) position in the LCA. This designation is indicative of a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within the occupation and signifies that the beneficiary is only expected to possess a basic understanding of the occupation. Furthermore, the petitioner's designation of the position under this wage level signifies that the beneficiary will be expected to work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results. Additionally, the beneficiary will be expected to perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. Moreover, the beneficiary's work will be closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy. Again, DOL guidance indicates that a job offer for a research fellow, a worker in training, or an internship is an indicator that a Level I wage should be considered.

The *Handbook* reports that certification may be advantageous or even required for some accountant positions. However, here there is no indication that the petitioner requires the beneficiary to have obtained the designation Certified Public Accountant (CPA), Certified Management Accountant (CMA) or any other professional designation to serve in the proffered position.

While the *Handbook* states that most accountant positions require at least a bachelor's degree in accounting or a related field, the *Handbook* continues by stating the following:

In some cases, those with associate's degrees, as well as bookkeepers and accounting clerks who meet the education and experience requirements set by their employers, get junior accounting positions and advance to accountant positions by showing their accounting skills on the job.

¹⁴ All of our references are to the 2014-2015 edition of the *Handbook*, which may be accessed at the Internet site <http://www.bls.gov/OCO/>.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 ed.*, Accountants and Auditors, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-4> (last visited August 15, 2014).

The *Handbook* does not support a finding that a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation. More specifically, the *Handbook* reports that some graduates from junior colleges, as well as bookkeepers and accounting clerks meeting education and experience requirements set by employers, can advance to accountant positions by demonstrating their accounting skills. According to the *Handbook*, individuals who have less than a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, can obtain junior accounting positions and then advance to accountant positions. The *Handbook* does not state that this education and experience must be the equivalent to at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty.

The *Handbook* does not indicate that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty is normally the minimum requirement for entry into this occupation. Rather, the occupation accommodates a wide spectrum of educational credentials, including less than a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty. The *Handbook* states that most accountants and auditors need at least a bachelor's degree, however, this statement does not support the view that any accountant job qualifies as a specialty occupation as "most" is not indicative that a particular position within the wide spectrum of accounting jobs normally requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.¹⁵ More specifically, "most" is not indicative that a position normally requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, (the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(I)), or that a position is so specialized and complex as to require knowledge usually associated with attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty (the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4)). Therefore, even if the proffered position were determined to be an accountant position, the *Handbook* does not support the assertion that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation.

We also reviewed the section of the *Handbook* relating to "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks," and find that the *Handbook* does not indicate that bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing

¹⁵ For instance, the first definition of "most" in *Webster's New College Dictionary* 731 (Third Edition, Hough Mifflin Harcourt 2008) is "[g]reatest in number, quantity, size, or degree." As such, if merely 51% of the positions require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, it could be said that "most" of the positions require such a degree. It cannot be found, therefore, that a particular degree requirement for "most" positions in a given occupation equates to a normal minimum entry requirement for that occupation, much less for the particular position proffered by the petitioner (which as noted above is designated as a Level I entry position in the LCA). Instead, a normal minimum entry requirement is one that denotes a standard entry requirement but recognizes that certain, limited exceptions to that standard may exist. To interpret this provision otherwise would run directly contrary to the plain language of the Act, which requires in part "attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States." Section 214(i)(1) of the Act.

clerks comprise an occupational group for which normally the minimum requirement for entry is at least a bachelor's degree, in a specific specialty, or the equivalent. The *Handbook* provides the following information in the subsection entitled "How to Become a Bookkeeping, Accounting or Auditing Clerk" for this occupational category:

Education

Most bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks need a high school diploma. However, some employers prefer candidates who have some postsecondary education, particularly coursework in accounting.

Training

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks usually get on-the-job training. Under the guidance of a supervisor or another experienced employee, new clerks learn how to do their tasks, including double-entry bookkeeping. (Double-entry bookkeeping means that each transaction is entered twice, once as a debit (cost) and once as a credit (income) to ensure that all accounts are balanced.)

Some formal classroom training also may be necessary, such as training in specialized computer software. This on-the-job training typically takes around 6 months.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 ed.*, Bookkeeping, Accounting, or Audit Clerks, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/office-and-administrative-support/bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm#tab-4> (last visited August 15, 2014).

We note that the *Handbook* does not report that, as an occupational group, "Bookkeeping, Accounting or Auditing Clerks" normally require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty for entry. The *Handbook* explains that most bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks need a high school diploma. The *Handbook* continues by stating that some employers prefer candidates who have some postsecondary education, particularly coursework in accounting. The *Handbook* further states that workers usually receive on-the-job training.

In response to the RFE, counsel submitted a copy of the O*NET summary report for the occupational category of "Accountants," and highlighted the portion related to the "Job Zone." We reviewed the printout in its entirety. However, we find that it is insufficient to establish that the position qualifies as a specialty occupation for which normally the minimum requirement for entry is at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. A designation of Job Zone 4 indicates that a position requires considerable preparation. It does not, however, demonstrate that a bachelor's degree in any specific specialty is required, and does not, therefore, demonstrate that a position so designated qualifies as a specialty occupation as defined in section 214(i)(1) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). More specifically, the OWL statement is a condensed version of what the O*NET actually states about its Job Zone 4 designation. See the O*NET OnLine Help Center, at <http://www.onetonline.org/help/online/zones> (explaining that Job Zone 4 signifies only

that *most* but not all of the occupations within it require a bachelor's degree). Further, the Help Center's discussion confirms that Job Zone 4 does not indicate any requirements for particular majors or academic concentrations. *Id.* Therefore, the O*NET information is not probative of the proffered position qualifying as a specialty occupation. It is incumbent on the petitioner to provide sufficient evidence to establish that the particular position that it proffers would necessitate services at a level requiring the theoretical and practical application of at least a bachelor's degree level of a body of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty.

In the instant case, the petitioner has not established that the proffered position falls under an occupational category for which the *Handbook*, or other authoritative source, indicates that normally the minimum requirement for entry is at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Furthermore, the duties and requirements of the proffered position as described in the record of proceeding by the petitioner do not indicate that the position is one for which a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry. Thus, the petitioner failed to satisfy the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1).

Next, we will review the record regarding the first of the two alternative prongs of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). This prong alternatively calls for a petitioner to establish that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common to the petitioner's industry in positions that are both: (1) parallel to the proffered position; and (2) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner.

In determining whether there is such a common degree requirement, factors often considered by USCIS include: whether the *Handbook* reports that the industry requires a degree; whether the industry's professional association has made a degree a minimum entry requirement; and whether letters or affidavits from firms or individuals in the industry attest that such firms "routinely employ and recruit only degreed individuals." See *Shanti, Inc. v. Reno*, 36 F. Supp. 2d 1151, 1165 (D. Minn. 1999) (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. 1095, 1102 (S.D.N.Y. 1989)).

Here and as already discussed, the petitioner has not established that its proffered position is one for which the *Handbook*, or other authoritative source, reports a standard industry-wide requirement of at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. Thus, we incorporate by reference our previous discussion on the matter. The record does not contain any letters from the industry's professional association, indicating that it has made a degree a minimum entry requirement.

In response to the director's RFE, counsel submitted copies of job advertisements in support of the assertion that the degree requirement is common to the petitioner's industry in parallel positions among similar organizations. However, upon review of the evidence, we find that counsel's reliance on the job announcements is misplaced.

We note that counsel did not provide any independent evidence of how representative the job advertisements are of the advertising employers' recruiting history for the type of jobs advertised.

Further, as the advertisements are only solicitations for hire, they are not evidence of the employers' actual hiring practices.

Furthermore, in the Form I-129, the petitioner stated that it is a retail company established in 1997. The petitioner also stated that it has three employees, and a gross annual income of \$3.25 million. The petitioner failed to provide its net annual income. The 2011 tax return submitted in response to the RFE states an ordinary business loss of \$18,755 for that year. The petitioner designated its business operations under the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 447110.¹⁶ This NAICS code is designated for "Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores." The U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau website describes this NAICS code by stating the following:

This industry comprises establishments engaged in retailing automotive fuels (e.g., diesel fuel, gasohol, gasoline) in combination with convenience store or food mart items. These establishments can either be in a convenience store (i.e., food mart) setting or a gasoline station setting. These establishments may also provide automotive repair services.

U.S. Dep't of Commerce, U.S Census Bureau, 2012 NAICS Definition, 447110 – Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores, on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/sssd/naics/naicsrch#> (last visited August 15, 2014).

For the petitioner to establish that an advertising organization is similar, it must demonstrate that the petitioner and the organization share the same general characteristics. Without such evidence, postings submitted by a petitioner are generally outside the scope of consideration for this criterion, which encompasses only organizations that are similar to the petitioner. When determining whether the petitioner and the advertising organization share the same general characteristics, such factors may include information regarding the nature or type of organization, and, when pertinent, the particular scope of operations, as well as the level of revenue and staffing (to list just a few elements that may be considered). It is not sufficient for the petitioner and counsel to claim that the organizations are similar and in the same industry without providing a legitimate basis for such an assertion.

The job postings do not establish eligibility under this criterion of the regulations. For instance, the advertisements include positions with organizations such as [REDACTED] (a footwear and accessories business); [REDACTED] (a telecommunications company); [REDACTED] (a mattress manufacturer); [REDACTED] (a cooperative of over 200 independent grocery retailers); [REDACTED] (an organization that provides professional services to numerous companies); [REDACTED] (a "multi-billion dollar diversified energy company"); and

¹⁶ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) is used to classify business establishments according to type of economic activity and each establishment is classified to an industry according to the primary business activity taking place there. See <http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/> (last visited August 15, 2014).

an unnamed "fifteen store conglomerate." Without further information, the majority of the advertisements appear to be for organizations that are not similar to the petitioner and the petitioner has not provided any probative evidence to suggest otherwise. The petitioner and counsel failed to supplement the record of proceeding to establish that the employers are similar to it.

Moreover, many of the advertisements do not appear to be for parallel positions. More specifically, counsel provided a posting for an operational accountant, which requires a degree and a "Minimum of 5 years in a financial/accounting management role." Additionally, counsel submitted a job posting for a senior accountant position, which requires candidates to possess a degree with "5-to-7 years' industry accounting experience." In addition, counsel submitted a posting for a senior accountant position, which requires a degree and "4-8 years of experience." As previously discussed, the petitioner designated the proffered position on the LCA through the wage level as a Level I (entry level) position. The advertised positions appear to be for more senior positions than the proffered position. More importantly, the petitioner has not sufficiently established that the primary duties and responsibilities of the advertised positions are parallel to the proffered position.

Contrary to the purpose for which the advertisements were submitted, some of the postings do not establish that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is required for the positions. For example, some of the postings state that a bachelor's degree is required, but they do not provide any further specification. Thus, they do not indicate that a bachelor's degree in a *specific specialty* that is directly related to the occupation is required. We here reiterate that the degree requirement set by the statutory and regulatory framework of the H-1B program is not just a bachelor's or higher degree, but such a degree in a *specific specialty* that is directly related to the duties of the position. Moreover, we observe that counsel submitted advertisements indicating that a bachelor's degree in business is acceptable. As previously mentioned, although a general-purpose bachelor's degree, such as a degree in business administration, may be a legitimate prerequisite for a particular position, requiring such a degree, without more, will not justify a finding that a particular position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation. See *Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d at 147.

As the documentation does not establish that the petitioner has met this prong of the regulations, further analysis regarding the specific information contained in each of the job postings is not necessary. That is, not every deficit of every job posting has been addressed. The evidence does not establish that similar organizations in the same industry routinely require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for parallel positions.¹⁷

¹⁷ Although the size of the relevant study population is unknown, the petitioner fails to demonstrate what statistically valid inferences, if any, can be drawn from these advertisements with regard to determining the common educational requirements for entry into parallel positions in similar companies. See generally Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* 186-228 (1995). Moreover, given that there is no indication that the advertisements were randomly selected, the validity of any such inferences could not be accurately determined even if the sampling unit were sufficiently large. See *id.* at 195-196 (explaining that "[r]andom selection is the key to [the] process [of probability sampling]" and that "random selection offers access to the body of probability theory, which provides the basis for estimates of population parameters and estimates of

Thus, based upon a complete review of the record, the petitioner has not established that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common to the petitioner's industry in positions that are both: (1) parallel to the proffered position; and (2) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner. For the reasons discussed above, the petitioner has not satisfied the first alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

We next consider the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2), which is satisfied if the petitioner shows that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

On appeal, counsel claims that the petitioner intends to "open the opportunities for development and expansion of the business." Although counsel claims that the petitioner has plans to expand its business operations, the petitioner did not provide probative documentation to support the claim (e.g., a business plan; documentation substantiating the expansion of physical facilities; plans to hire staff; evidence substantiating that the petitioner intends to establish branch, subsidiary or affiliate offices; probative evidence substantiating investments or new revenue sources; or other documentation regarding development/expansion plans).¹⁸

In support of its assertion that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation, the petitioner submitted various documents, including evidence regarding its business operations. For example, the petitioner submitted tax documents, invoices, corporate documents, licenses, permits, and bank statements. We reviewed the record of proceeding in its entirety. However, upon review of the record, we find that the petitioner failed to sufficiently develop relative complexity or uniqueness as an aspect of the proffered position.

That is, a review of the record of proceeding indicates that the petitioner has failed to credibly demonstrate the duties the beneficiary will be responsible for or perform on a day-to-day basis constitute a position so complex or unique that it can only be performed by a person with at least a

error.")

As such, even if the job announcements supported the finding that the position of accountant for companies that are similar to the petitioner requires a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, it cannot be found that such a limited number of postings that appear to have been consciously selected could credibly refute the findings of the *Handbook* published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that such a position does not require at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty for entry into the occupation in the United States.

¹⁸ Counsel's claim that the petitioner intends to expand its business operations in the future is insufficient to demonstrate that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. That is, a petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing the nonimmigrant visa petition. See 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(b)(1). A visa petition may not be approved at a future date after the petitioner or beneficiary becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *Matter of Michelin Tire Corp.*, 17 I&N Dec. 248 (Reg. Comm'r 1978).

bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Additionally, we find that the petitioner has not provided sufficient documentation to support a claim that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can only be performed by an individual with a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.¹⁹ Again, this is further evidenced by the LCA submitted by the petitioner in support of the instant petition.

As previously mentioned, the Level I wage-level of the proffered position indicates that the beneficiary is only required to have a basic understanding of the occupation; that he will be expected to perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment; that he will be closely supervised and his work closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that he will receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results. Without further evidence, it is simply not credible that the petitioner's proffered position is complex or unique as such a position would likely be classified at a higher-level, such as a Level III (experienced) or Level IV (fully competent) position, requiring a significantly higher prevailing wage. For example, a Level IV (fully competent) position is designated by DOL for employees who "use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems."²⁰

The petitioner fails to demonstrate how the duties of the position as described require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge such that a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is required to perform them. For instance, the petitioner did not submit information relevant to a detailed course of study leading to a specialty degree and did not establish how such a curriculum is necessary to perform the duties it may believe are so complex and unique. While a few related courses may be beneficial, or even required, in performing certain duties of the position, the petitioner has failed to demonstrate how an established curriculum of such courses leading to a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is required to perform the duties of the proffered position.

We observe that the petitioner has indicated that the beneficiary's background and his prior work experience will assist him in carrying out the duties of the proffered position. However, the test to establish a position as a specialty occupation is not the skill set or education of a proposed beneficiary, but whether the position itself requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge obtained by at least baccalaureate-level knowledge in a specialized area. The petitioner fails to demonstrate that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Consequently, it cannot be concluded that the petitioner has satisfied the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

¹⁹ Moreover, the petitioner has not provided sufficient evidence to establish that the beneficiary has been performing, and will continue to perform, the duties as described by the petitioner.

²⁰ For additional information regarding wage levels as defined by DOL, see U.S. Dep't of Labor, Emp't & Training Admin., *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagric. Immigration Programs (rev. Nov. 2009), available at http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf

The third criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) entails an employer demonstrating that it normally requires a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, for the position. To this end, we usually review the petitioner's past recruiting and hiring practices, as well as information regarding employees who previously held the position.

To merit approval of the petition under this criterion, the record must establish that a petitioner's imposition of a degree requirement is not merely a matter of preference for high-caliber candidates but is necessitated by performance requirements of the position. Upon review of the record of proceeding, the petitioner has not established a prior history of recruiting and hiring for the proffered position only persons with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

While a petitioner may believe or otherwise assert that a proffered position requires a specific degree, that opinion alone without corroborating evidence cannot establish the position as a specialty occupation. Were USCIS limited solely to reviewing a petitioner's claimed self-imposed requirements, then any individual with a bachelor's degree could be brought to the United States to perform any occupation as long as the petitioner artificially created a token degree requirement, whereby all individuals employed in a particular position possessed a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty, or its equivalent. *See Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d at 388. In other words, if a petitioner's stated degree requirement is only designed to artificially meet the standards for an H-1B visa and/or to underemploy an individual in a position for which he or she is overqualified and if the proffered position does not in fact require such a specialty degree or its equivalent, to perform its duties, the occupation would not meet the statutory or regulatory definition of a specialty occupation. *See* § 214(i)(1) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "specialty occupation").

To satisfy this criterion, the evidence of record must show that the specific performance requirements of the position generated the recruiting and hiring history. A petitioner's perfunctory declaration of a particular educational requirement will not mask the fact that the position is not a specialty occupation. USCIS must examine the actual employment requirements, and, on the basis of that examination, determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *See generally Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F. 3d 384. In this pursuit, the critical element is not the title of the position, or the fact that an employer has routinely insisted on certain educational standards, but whether performance of the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in the specific specialty as the minimum for entry into the occupation as required by the Act. To interpret the regulations any other way would lead to absurd results: if USCIS were constrained to recognize a specialty occupation merely because the petitioner has an established practice of demanding certain educational requirements for the proffered position - and without consideration of how a beneficiary is to be specifically employed - then any alien with a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty could be brought into the United States to perform non-specialty occupations, so long as the employer required all such employees to have baccalaureate or higher degrees. *See id.* at 388.

On appeal, counsel asserts that the proffered position "has always been [filled] by individuals with education and experience equivalent to a U.S. Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Accounting, or a related degree." However, counsel did not provide any documentation to support this assertion. Without documentary evidence to support the claim, the assertions of counsel will not satisfy the petitioner's burden of proof. Again, the unsupported assertions of counsel do not constitute evidence. *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Laureano*, 19 I&N Dec. 1 (BIA 1983); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980). We observe that the petitioner claims in the Form I-129 that the company was established in 2010. Thus, it is not apparent that anyone other than the beneficiary has been employed in the proffered position.

Upon review of the record, the petitioner has not provided sufficient probative evidence to establish that it normally requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, for the proffered position. Thus, the petitioner has not satisfied the third criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

The fourth criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) requires a petitioner to establish that the nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform them is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

Counsel claims that the nature of the specific duties of the position in the context of the petitioner's business operations is so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform them is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. We reviewed all of the evidence in the record, including submitted tax documents, invoices, corporate documents, licenses, permits, and bank statements. We also considered the petitioner's statement regarding the proffered position. However, we find that the submitted documentation fails to support the assertion that the proffered position satisfies this criterion of the regulations. More specifically, in the instant case, relative specialization and complexity have not been sufficiently developed by the petitioner as an aspect of the proffered position.

Furthermore, we also reiterate our earlier comments and findings with regard to the implication of the petitioner's designation of the proffered position in the LCA as a Level I (the lowest of four assignable levels). That is, the Level I wage designation is indicative of a low, entry-level position relative to others within the occupational category, and hence one not likely distinguishable by relatively specialized and complex duties. As noted earlier, DOL indicates that a Level I designation is appropriate for "beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation." Without further evidence, it is not credible that the petitioner's proffered position is one with specialized and complex duties as such a position would likely be classified at a higher-level, such as a Level III (experienced) or Level IV (fully competent) position, requiring a significantly higher prevailing wage. For instance, as previously mentioned, a Level IV (fully competent) position is designated by DOL for employees who "use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems."

The petitioner has submitted inadequate probative evidence to satisfy this criterion of the regulations. Thus, the petitioner has not established that the duties of the position are so specialized and complex that the knowledge required to perform the duties is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. We, therefore, conclude that the petitioner failed to satisfy the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

For the reasons related in the preceding discussion, the petitioner has failed to establish that it has satisfied any of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) and, therefore, it cannot be found that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. The appeal will be dismissed and the petition denied for this reason.

IV. BENEFICIARY'S QUALIFICATIONS

In addition to the above described deficiencies of the instant petition, we note a further issue that precludes approval of requested benefit. Although we need not examine the issue of the beneficiary's qualifications where the petitioner has not provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the position is a specialty occupation, we find that in this matter the petitioner has not demonstrated that the beneficiary is qualified to perform services in any specialty occupation position.

Specifically, the claimed equivalency to a bachelor's degree in a specific discipline was based on the beneficiary's work experience. However, there is no evidence that the evaluator had the authority to grant college-level credit for work experience in the specialty at an accredited college or university which has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience and that the beneficiary also has recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions directly related to the specialty. See 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(4) and (D)(1).

In the instant case, we observe that the petitioner provided an evaluation of the beneficiary's credentials performed by a commercial evaluation service. USCIS does not accept evaluations of work experience from commercial evaluation services. Further, even if the evaluation had not been performed by a commercial service, there is no independent evidence in the record from appropriate officials, such as deans or provosts, to establish that [REDACTED] is, in the language of the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1), "an official [with] authority to grant college-level credit for training and/or experience in the specialty at an accredited college or university which has a program for granting such credit based on an individual's training and/or work experience."

Furthermore, upon review of the beneficiary's employment letters, we find that the letters provide insufficient information regarding the beneficiary's work history and duties (e.g., complexity of the job duties; the level of judgment; the amount and level of supervision; the level of understanding required to perform the job duties). The letters describe the beneficiary's duties in terms of a few functions that do not convey the substantive nature of the work that the beneficiary performed. The letters do not present an adequate factual foundation for any evaluator to determine that the

beneficiary has the education, specialized training, and/or progressively responsible experience that are equivalent to completion of a United States baccalaureate or higher degree in the specialty occupation, and that he has recognition of expertise in the specialty through progressively responsible positions directly related to the specialty. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(C)(4). Thus, we find that the evaluation fails to establish that the beneficiary's education, training and/or work experience are the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty based upon the information provided. In light of the lack of a sufficient factual foundation discussed above, the evaluation is insufficient even if it had been rendered by an official qualified under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(1).

Moreover, when USCIS determines a beneficiary's qualifications pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5), it must be demonstrated that the beneficiary's training and/or work experience included the theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge required by the specialty occupation; that the alien's experience was gained while working with peers, supervisors, or subordinates who have a degree or its equivalent in the specialty occupation; and that the beneficiary has documented recognition of expertise in the specialty. In the instant case, the documentation from the beneficiary's prior employers does not establish that his work experience included the theoretical and practical application of specialized knowledge and that his experience was gained while working with peers, supervisors, or subordinates who have a degree in the specialty occupation, or its equivalent. Additionally, the petitioner did not submit probative documentation establishing that the beneficiary has recognition of expertise in the specialty. As such, since evidence was not presented that the beneficiary has at least a U.S. bachelor's degree in any specific specialty, or its equivalent, the petition could not be approved even if eligibility for the benefit sought had been otherwise established.

We observe that the instant petition seeks to extend the beneficiary's H-1B employment with the petitioner, and note that we are not required to approve applications or petitions where eligibility has not been demonstrated, merely because of prior approvals that may have been erroneous. *See, e.g. Matter of Church Scientology International*, 19 I&N Dec. 593, 597 (Comm'r 1988).

V. CONCLUSION

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*, 229 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 145 (noting that the AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis).

Moreover, when we deny a petition on multiple alternative grounds, a plaintiff can succeed on a challenge only if it shows that we abused our discretion with respect to all of the enumerated grounds. *See Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 229 F. Supp. 2d at 1043, *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683.

In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361; *Matter of Otiende*, 26 I&N Dec. 127, 128 (BIA 2013). Here, that burden has not been met.

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