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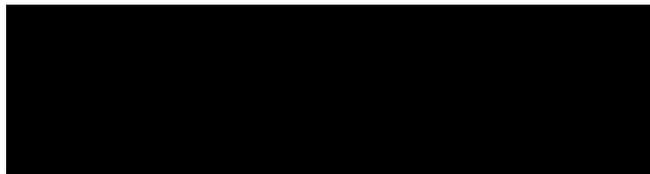
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FILE: WAC 04 093 50011 Office: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER Date: DEC 09 2005

IN RE: Petitioner: [Redacted]
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:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

Robert P. Wiemann

Robert P. Wiemann, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

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

The petitioner is an automobile and body repair shop that seeks to employ the beneficiary as an accountant. The petitioner, therefore, endeavors 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 the basis that the petitioner had failed to establish that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation under the criteria set forth at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

Section 214(i)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (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 term “specialty occupation” is further defined at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as:

[A]n occupation which 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 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, the position must 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.

Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) 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 proposed position.

The record of proceeding before the AAO contains (1) the Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director's request for evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner's RFE response and supporting documentation; (4) the director's denial letter; and (5) the Form I-290B and supporting documentation. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

The petitioner, an automobile and body repair shop with 14 employees, was established in 1987 and, according to the Form I-129, has a gross annual income of \$1.2 million. It proposes to hire the beneficiary as an accountant. In counsel's May 10, 2004 response to the director's request for evidence, the duties of the proposed position were set forth as follows:

- 1.) She will prepare, analyze, and verify the quarterly and yearly tax returns, perform audits, prepare payroll statements and deductions, monthly expense reports[,] and financial statements.
- 2.) Beneficiary will handle the preparation of the company's monthly and yearly financial reports, monitor information systems, and compile and analyze financial information.
- 3.) She will detail the company assets, liabilities, and capital[,] and will provide tax planning advise [sic].
- 4.) [The beneficiary] will review finances and current taxes and devise a long range tax plan and recommend ways to reduce taxes.
- 5.) She will advise and recommend tax strategies, and advantages and disadvantages of certain business decisions or transactions to [p]etitioner. [The beneficiary] will also prepare the quarterly sales tax report for submission to the State Board of Equalization and the quarterly report for submission to the EDD.
- 6.) She will be responsible for devising a financial system that will help the company establish a more systematic and smooth inventory procedure.
- 7.) Beneficiary will be preparing the company's balance sheets, profit and loss statements, necessary checks, payroll, tax remittances, and other reports to summarize the company's current and projected financial position. She will also prepare a comparative report on the previous month's sales with the current month just ended.
- 8.) She will modify and coordinate the implementation of the accounting and accounting control procedures.
- 9.) Beneficiary will monitor the company's budgeting, performance evaluation, [and] cost and assets management.

- 10.) Finally, [the beneficiary] will prepare the company's letter correspondence with the existing and prospective clients regarding transactions, financing and billing statements[,] and will analyze all transactions.

Counsel noted that 45 percent of the beneficiary's time would be spent preparing and balancing financial statements (monthly and yearly reports, profit and loss statements, balance sheets, current and projected financial position of the company, and general ledger); 25 percent of her time would be spent maintaining an accounting system to monitor budgeting, performance evaluation, and cost and asset management; and 30 percent of her time would be spent making recommendations to management regarding tax strategies and other business decisions and transactions.

The director denied the petition, finding that the petitioner had satisfied none of the four criteria set forth at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), and therefore had not established that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation.

On appeal, counsel contends that the director erred in denying the petition, and that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation. Counsel also contends that the director abused his discretion in denying the petition.

The AAO agrees with counsel that, as a general matter, accountant positions normally qualify for classification as specialty occupations. However, the AAO disagrees with counsel's assertion that the position proposed here is that of an accountant.

In determining whether a proposed position qualifies as a specialty occupation, CIS looks beyond the title of the position and determines, from a review of the duties of the position and any supporting evidence, whether the position actually requires the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and the attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty, as the minimum for entry into the occupation as required by the Act. The AAO routinely consults the Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (the *Handbook*) for its information about the duties and educational requirements of particular occupations.

According to the *Handbook* there are four major fields of accounting – public, management, government, and internal auditors – of which management accountant appears closest to the proposed position. The *Handbook* sets forth the following description of the duties of a management accountant:

Management accountants – also called cost, managerial, industrial, corporate, or private accountants – record and analyze the financial information of the companies for which they work. Other responsibilities include budgeting, performance evaluation, cost management, and asset management. Usually, management accountants are part of executive teams involved in strategic planning or new-product development. They analyze and interpret the financial information that corporate executives need to make sound business decisions. They also prepare financial reports for nonmanagement groups, including stockholders, creditors, regulatory agencies, and tax authorities. Within accounting departments, they may work in various areas, including financial analysis, planning and budgeting, and cost accounting.

The *Handbook* also states that, increasingly, accountants “not only provide clients with accounting and tax help, but also help them develop personal budgets, manage assets and investments, plan for retirement, and recognize and reduce exposure to risks.”

By comparison, the *Handbook* describes the occupation of bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks as follows:

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks are an organization’s financial recordkeepers. They update and maintain one or more accounting records, including those which tabulate expenditures, receipts, accounts payable and receivable, and profit and loss. They have a wide range of skills and knowledge from full-charge bookkeepers who can maintain an entire company’s books to accounting clerks who handle specific accounts. All of these clerks make numerous computations each day and increasingly must be comfortable using computers to calculate and record data.

In small establishments, *bookkeeping clerks* handle all financial transactions and recordkeeping. They record all transactions, post debits and credits, produce financial statements, and prepare reports and summaries for supervisors and managers. Bookkeepers also prepare bank deposits by compiling data from cashiers, verifying and balancing receipts, and sending cash, checks, or other forms of payment to the bank. They also may handle payroll, make purchases, prepare invoices, and keep track of overdue accounts.

In large offices and accounting departments, *accounting clerks* have more specialized tasks . . . such as accounts payable . . . or accounts receivable . . . Entry-level accounting clerks post details of transactions, total accounts, and compute interest charges. They also may monitor loans and accounts, to ensure that payments are up to date.

More advanced accounting clerks may total, balance, and reconcile billing vouchers; ensure completeness and accuracy of data on accounts; and code documents, according to company procedures. These workers post transactions in journals and on computer files and update the files when needed

Auditing clerks verify records of transactions posted by other workers. They check figures, postings, and documents to ensure that they are correct, mathematically accurate, and properly coded

As organizations continue to computerize their financial records, many bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks are using specialized accounting software on personal computers. With manual posting to general ledgers becoming obsolete, these clerks increasingly are posting charges to accounts on computer spreadsheets and databases The widespread use of computers . . . has enabled bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks to take on additional responsibilities, such as payroll, procurement, and billing.

According to the *Handbook*, a two-year associate’s degree in business or accounting is often required for bookkeeping and accounting clerk positions. A four-year bachelor’s degree is not required for entry-level positions. The *Handbook* does indicate that many individuals with four-year degrees accept bookkeeping and accounting clerk positions in order to enter the field or a particular company with the goal of being promoted

to professional or managerial positions. The *Handbook* also indicates that many graduates of junior colleges and business and correspondence schools can obtain junior accounting positions.

As discussed in the *Handbook*, bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks produce financial statements and prepare reports and summaries for supervisors and managers, which would be used by them to make sound business decisions. Further, the *Handbook* reports that employers require most financial clerks to have at least a high school diploma, and for bookkeepers and accounting clerks, they often require an associate's degree in business or accounting.¹

The *Handbook* describes the occupation of a tax preparer as follows:

Prepare tax returns for individuals or small businesses but do not have the background or responsibilities of an accredited or certified public accountant.

The *Handbook* indicates that the normal educational requirement for a tax preparer is "moderate-term on-the-job training."

A petitioner's creation of a position with a perfunctory bachelor's degree requirement will not mask the fact that the position is not a specialty occupation. CIS must examine the ultimate employment of the alien, and determine whether the position qualifies as a specialty occupation. *Cf. Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384 (5th Cir. 2000). The critical element is not the title of the position or 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.² To interpret the regulations any other way would lead to absurd results: if CIS were limited to reviewing a petitioner's self-imposed employment requirements, then any alien with a bachelor's degree could be brought into the United States to perform a menial, non-professional, or an otherwise non-specialty occupation, so long as the employer required all such employees to have baccalaureate or higher degrees. *See id.* at 388.

The record in this case does not support the assertion that the duties of the proposed position require a bachelor's degree in accounting or a related specialty. While this position may include some duties that involve accounting functions, the AAO is not persuaded that they are at a level of specialization or complexity that they require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge and a baccalaureate degree or its equivalent. The proposed position lacks critical characteristics of a management accounting position, as described in the *Handbook*. For example, the *Handbook* indicates that management accountants are involved in strategic planning or new-product development, usually as part

¹ According to the website of Skyline College (<http://www.skylinecollege.net>), a community college located in San Mateo, California, an associate's degree in business or accounting would involve learning the fundamentals of financial accounting principles and concepts, balance sheets, income statements, cash flow statements, the generally accepted accounting procedures (GAAP), forecasting, budgeting, cost accounting, break even analysis, developing and operating a computerized accounting system using tools such as QuickBooks, QuickBooks Pro, or Peachtree, an integrated commercial accounting software package that is used to review, differentiate, and interpret accounting concepts and data in a multitude of business situations. Thus, an associate's degree would provide knowledge about accounting techniques that would serve the needs of management and facilitate decision-making.

² The court in *Defensor v. Meissner* observed that the four criteria at 8 C.F.R. 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) present certain ambiguities when compared to the statutory definition, and "might also be read as merely an additional requirement that a position must meet, in addition to the statutory and regulatory definition." *See id.* at 387.

of an executive team, and prepare financial reports for nonmanagement groups like stockholders, creditors, regulatory agencies, and tax authorities. Such functions are not reflected in the petitioner's description of the proposed position's duties. The scope of the proposed position lacks both the breadth and the depth of a management accounting position.

As noted previously, the petitioner is an automobile and body repair shop with 14 employees. The Form I-129 reports a gross annual income of \$1.2 million, and the Form 1120, U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return for tax year 2002 reports gross sales of \$1,175,716. On appeal, counsel asserts that the petitioner earned \$975,000 in gross income in 2003. Though the size of the company does not, in and of itself, determine a company's need for an accountant, its income level and scale of operations have a direct and substantial bearing on the scope of the duties the beneficiary would perform as an accountant. The responsibilities associated with a gross annual income of \$975,000 differ considerably from the responsibilities associated with an annual income in the millions, or tens of millions, as well as from the responsibilities of performing accounting work for multiple clients. The record does not support a finding that the petitioner will employ the beneficiary in an accounting position.

Rather, the AAO concludes that the proposed position describes the duties of an experienced bookkeeping, accounting, or auditing clerk. Many of the duties – such as preparing payroll statements and deductions, monthly expense reports, financial statements, financial reports, balance sheets, profit and loss statements, checks, company correspondence, and billing statements, and detailing assets and liabilities – accord with the *Handbook's* description of bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks. As discussed in the *Handbook*, a baccalaureate or higher degree is not the normal minimum requirement for entry into bookkeeping, accounting, or auditing clerk positions, though employers often require a two-year associate's degree in business or accounting. Tax preparers prepare tax returns, and they are not required to possess degrees, either. Considering the nature of the petitioner's business, the scale of its operations, and the duties of the proposed position, the AAO concludes that the duties of the proposed position combine those of a bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerk, and a tax preparer. Since these positions do not require a baccalaureate degree in accounting or a related specialty, the proposed position does not meet the first criterion required for classification as a specialty occupation under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1).

Nor does the proposed position qualify as a specialty occupation under either prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). The first prong of this regulation requires a showing that a specific degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations. No evidence has been presented to support the contention that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation under this prong. Moreover, as noted previously, the AAO does not accept the contention that the proposed position is that of an accountant.

Counsel states the following on appeal:

Additionally, as previously stated, the degree requirement is common to the industry in parallel positions. Petitioner, through [c]ounsel submitted numerous job listings for accountant positions which unequivocally state that a bachelor's degree is the minimum requirement by the companies. Again, it is unclear what evidence the Service requires to satisfy them [sic]. Perhaps, the Service would like to see advertisements from companies similar to [p]etitioner in every respect. However, this issue has already been addressed by [c]ounsel in her response to the Service's previous request for evidence.

To meet the burden of proof imposed by the regulatory language, a petitioner must establish that its degree requirement exists in parallel positions among similar organizations. However, the “numerous job listings” referred to by counsel are not contained in the record of proceeding. The AAO has reviewed counsel’s response to the director’s request for evidence and the petitioner’s letter of support filed with the initial submission and finds that neither counsel nor the petitioner have addressed this criterion at any point in this proceeding.

No evidence has been submitted to document that other companies of similar scope and scale of operations to the petitioner, an automobile and body repair shop with 14 employees, require the services of an in-house accountant. Simply going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm. 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972)).

Accordingly, the proposed position does not qualify as a specialty occupation under the first prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

The second prong of this regulation requires that the petitioner prove that the duties of the proposed position are so complex or unique that only an individual with a degree can perform them. The nature of the duties of the proposed position as set forth in the petition does not support such a finding, as the duties of the proposed position are similar to those of bookkeepers, auditing clerks, accounting clerks, or tax preparers, and do not require a four-year degree.

Therefore, counsel has not established that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation under either prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

The proposed position does not qualify as a specialty occupation under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3), which requires a showing that the petitioner normally requires a degree or its equivalent for the position. To determine a petitioner’s ability to meet this criterion, the AAO normally reviews the petitioner’s past employment practices, as well as the histories, including names and dates of employment, of those employees with degrees who previously held the position, and copies of those employees’ diplomas. However, no such evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposed position qualifies under this criterion.

In order to establish eligibility under this criterion, a petitioner must demonstrate that it normally hires individuals with a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent for the position. The petitioner has never before filled this position, which precludes approval under this criterion.

Accordingly, the proposed position does not qualify as a specialty occupation under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3).

The fourth criterion, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4), requires the petitioner to establish that the nature of the proposed position’s 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 the specialty. As previously discussed, the AAO is not persuaded by the evidence of record, including the nature and scale of the petitioner’s business operations, that the duties of the position exceed the occupational scope of an experienced bookkeeper, auditing clerk, or accounting clerk, positions which do not require specialized knowledge at a baccalaureate level. Thus, the proposed position does not qualify for classification as a specialty occupation under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

The petitioner has failed to establish that the proposed position qualifies for classification as a specialty occupation under any of the four criteria set forth at 8 C.F.R. §§ 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1), (2), (3), and (4). Accordingly, the AAO will not disturb the director's denial of the petition.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not sustained that burden.

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