



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

(b)(6)

[Redacted]

Date: JUN 26 2013

Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER [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:

[Redacted]

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

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

Thank you,

  
Ron Rosenberg  
Acting Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

**DISCUSSION:** The service center 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 describes itself on the Form I-129 visa petition an "Imaging Facilities" business. In order to employ the beneficiary in what it designates as a general manager position, the petitioner endeavors to classify her 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, finding that the petitioner failed to establish that it would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. On appeal, counsel asserts that the director's basis for denial was erroneous and contends that the petitioner satisfied all evidentiary requirements.

As will be discussed below, the AAO has determined that the director did not err in his decision to deny the petition on the specialty occupation issue. Accordingly, the director's decision will not be disturbed. The appeal will be dismissed, and the petition will be denied.

The AAO bases its decision upon its review of the entire record of proceeding, which includes: (1) the petitioner's Form I-129 and the supporting documentation filed with it; (2) the service center's request for additional evidence (RFE); (3) the petitioner's response to the RFE; (4) the director's denial letter; and (5) the Form I-290B and counsel's submissions on appeal.

The issue on appeal is whether the petitioner has demonstrated that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. To meet its burden of proof in this regard, the petitioner must establish that the employment it is offering to the beneficiary meets the following statutory and regulatory requirements.

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b), provides a nonimmigrant classification for aliens who are coming temporarily to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation. 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, the 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 illogical and absurd 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), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (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.

The Labor Condition Application (LCA) submitted by the petitioner in support the petition was certified for the SOC (O\*NET/OES) Code 11-1021, the associated Occupational Classification of "General and Operations Managers," and a Level I (entry-level) prevailing wage rate.

With the visa petition, counsel provided a letter, dated November 16, 2011, from the petitioner's medical and health services manager. That letter states the following as the duties of the proffered position:

- Planning, directing and implementing the business plan for the opening of the Naguabo facilities during 2012.
- Conducting and administering fiscal operations, including accounting, planning budgets, authorizing expenditures, establishing rates for services, and coordinating financial reporting of both imaging facilities.
- Establishing work schedules and assignments for staff, according to workload, space and equipment availability.
- Overseeing administrative activities directly related to providing imaging services.
- Directing and coordinating business related activities concerned with the marketing and offering of services.
- Reviewing financial statements, sales and activity reports, and other performance data to measure productivity and goal achievement and to determine areas needing cost reduction and improvement.

- Establishing and implementing policies, goals, objectives, and procedures, conferring with staff members as necessary.
- Determining staffing requirements, and interviewing, hiring and training new employees.
- Planning and directing activities such as sales promotions.
- Determining services to be offered, and setting competitive prices and credit terms, based on area needs or customer demand.
- Establishing rapport with vendors and suppliers in order to obtain quality products for the services being offered.
- Looking for new market opportunities based on the needs of the areas being served.
- Promoting the services offered by the imaging centers at local and island-wide health fairs, conventions or other related activities.

That letter did not indicate that the proffered position requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

On December 2, 2011, the service center issued an RFE in this matter. The service center requested, *inter alia*, evidence that the petitioner would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation.

In response, counsel submitted: (1) a description of the proffered position; and (2) counsel's own letter, dated February 25, 2012.

In his letter, counsel stated that the proffered position requires a bachelor's degree in business administration. He also provided the following, reordered, description of the duties of the proffered position:

- Planning, directing and implementing the business plan for the opening of the Naguabo facility during 2012. Looking for new market opportunities based on the needs of the areas being served. 20%
- Overseeing administrative activities directly related to providing imaging services. Determining services to be offered, and setting competitive prices and credit terms, based on area needs or customer demand. Conducting and administering fiscal operations, including accounting, planning budgets, authorizing expenditures, establishing rates for services, and coordinating financial reporting of both imaging facilities. 30%

- Establishing and implementing policies, goals, objectives, and procedures, conferring with staff members as necessary. Establishing work schedules and assignments for staff, according to workload, space and equipment availability; determining staffing requirements, and interviewing, hiring and training new employees. 15%
- Directing and coordinating business related activities concerned with the marketing and offering of services. Planning and directing activities such as sales promotions. Promoting the services offered by the imaging centers at local and island-wide health fairs, conventions or other related activities. 15%
- Reviewing financial statements, sales and activity reports, and other performance data to measure productivity and goal achievement and to determine areas needing cost reduction and improvement. 15%
- Establishing rapport with vendors and suppliers in order to obtain quality products for the services being offered. 5%

The description of the proffered position contains the following, somewhat different, description of the duties of the position:

**RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. Engineer business of imaging facilities so that it wins the competitive race.
2. Design products to expand the company's business beyond imaging facilities
3. Implement financial engineering of the whole operation to guarantee healthy flows, obtain loans for expansions and state of the art imaging equipment.
4. Creation of networks. This is a sensitive area in which the [person in the proffered position] must establish rapport with vendors, suppliers, and referring physicians to ensure that the market's demands are being satisfied and to obtain quality products for the services being offered.
5. Prospection of business opportunities and customers. Expertise in logistics is needed to ensure the correct assessment of the economy and the markets to develop effective marketing strategies.
6. Design and implement marketing campaigns and business plans to advance business and revenues.
7. Interview and recruit qualified personnel for the administrative area.
8. Oversee the day-to-day operations of the staff to make it optimal.
9. Supervise billing and collection
10. Communicate with patients and provide immediate attendance to service complaints.
11. Assess the processes and improve them until optimum results have been achieved
12. Report to Supervising Physician any deviation from normal operation and design and agree on corrective courses of action.
13. Provide OSI (CPA) information necessary to process payroll

14. Manage staff's time and attendance record as well as lunch breaks to ensure availability of services during hours of operation; organize and maintain all files, forms, and any other administrative matters.

**ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. Perform other related duties required of you
2. Responsible for logistics of maintaining inventory of materials and supplies needed.
3. Supervise payment of invoices, keep track of the accounting books, manuals and documents.
3. [sic] Collect and prepare supporting documents when loans are needed to purchase radiological equipment, remodel or improve facilities.
4. Contribute to the performance of [the petitioner] by reporting to Supervising Physician observed shortcomings and suggesting corrective actions for the same or actions that could improve the functioning of the systems, recruitment of staff or other areas.
5. In case of resignation/retirement, inform the Supervising Physician in writing 15 working days prior to resignation/retirement date.

The description of the proffered position also reiterates that it requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree in business.

The director denied the petition on March 13, 2012, finding, as was noted above, that the petitioner had not demonstrated that the proffered position qualifies as a position in a specialty occupation by virtue of requiring a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. More specifically, the director found that the petitioner had satisfied none of the supplemental criteria set forth at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

As a preliminary matter, counsel's claim that a bachelor's degree in business administration is a sufficient minimum requirement for entry into the proffered position is inadequate to establish that the proffered position qualifies 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 position in question. Since there must be a close correlation between the required specialized studies and the position, the requirement of 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 prove 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. As explained above, 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. USCIS has consistently stated that, 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.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the assertion that the duties of the proffered position can be performed by an individual with only a general-purpose bachelor's degree, i.e., a bachelor's degree in business administration, is tantamount to an admission that the proffered position is not in fact a specialty occupation. The director's decision must therefore be affirmed and the petition denied on this basis alone.

Moreover, it also cannot be found that the proffered position is a specialty occupation due to the petitioner's failure to satisfy any of the supplemental, additional criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

The AAO will first discuss the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(I), which is satisfied if a baccalaureate or higher degree, or its equivalent, in a specific specialty is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position.

The AAO recognizes the U.S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)* as an authoritative source on the duties and educational requirements of the wide variety of occupations that it addresses.<sup>2</sup> In its "Top Executives" chapter, the *Handbook* provides the following description of the duties of those positions:

### **Duties**

Top executives typically do the following:

- Establish and carry out departmental or organizational goals, policies, and procedures
- Direct and oversee an organization's financial and budgetary activities
- Manage general activities related to making products and providing services

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

*Id.*

<sup>2</sup> The *Handbook*, which is available in printed form, may also be accessed online at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. The AAO's references to the *Handbook* are to the 2012 – 2013 edition available online.

- Consult with other executives, staff, and board members about general operations
- Negotiate or approve contracts and agreements
- Appoint department heads and managers
- Analyze financial statements, sales reports, and other performance indicators
- Identify places to cut costs and to improve performance, policies, and programs

The responsibilities of top executives largely depend on an organization's size. For example, an owner or manager of a small organization, such as an independent retail store, often is responsible for purchasing, hiring, training, quality control, and day-to-day supervisory duties. In large organizations, on the other hand, top executives typically focus more on formulating policies and strategic planning, while general and operations managers direct day-to-day operations.

The following are examples of common types of top executives:

**Chief executive officers (CEOs)**, who are also known by titles such as **executive director**, **president**, and **vice president**, provide overall direction for companies and organizations. CEOs manage company operations, formulate policies, and ensure goals are met. They collaborate with and direct the work of other top executives and typically report to a board of directors.

Companies may also have chief officers who lead various departments or focus on specific areas of work:

- **Chief financial officers** are accountable for the accuracy of a company's or organization's financial reporting, especially among publicly traded companies. They direct the organization's financial goals, objectives, and budgets. For example, they may oversee the investment of funds and manage associated risks.
- **Chief information officers** are responsible for the overall technological direction of an organization, which includes managing the information technology and computer systems. They organize and supervise information-technology-related workers, projects, and policies.
- **Chief operating officers** oversee other executives who direct the activities of various departments, such as human resources and sales. They also carry out the organization's guidelines on a day-to-day basis.
- **Chief sustainability officers** address sustainability issues by enacting or overseeing a corporate sustainability strategy. For instance, they may manage programs and policies relating to

environmental issues and ensure that the organization complies with environmental or other government regulations.

*Mayors*, along with *governors*, *city managers*, and *county administrators*, are chief executive officers of governments. They typically oversee budgets, programs, and uses of resources. Mayors and governors must be elected to office, and managers and administrators typically are appointed.

*School superintendents* and *college or university presidents* are chief executive officers of school districts and postsecondary schools. In addition to overseeing operations, they also manage issues, such as student achievement, budgets and resources, and relations with government agencies and other stakeholders.

*General and operations managers* oversee operations that are too diverse and general to be classified into one area of management or administration. Responsibilities may include formulating policies, managing daily operations, and planning the use of materials and human resources. They make staff schedules, assign work, and ensure projects are completed. In some organizations, the tasks of chief executive officers may overlap with those of general and operations managers.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2012-13 ed., "Top Executives," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/top-executives.htm#tab-2> (last visited Jun. 21, 2013).

The duties the attributed to the proffered position in the letter dated November 16, 2011 from the petitioner's medical and health services manager, in counsel's February 25, 2012 letter, and in the description of the proffered position submitted in response to the RFE are consistent with the duties of Top Executives, and, more specifically, General and Operations Managers, as described in the *Handbook*. On the balance, the AAO finds that the duties of the proffered position generally align with those of General and Operations Managers positions as they are described in the Top Executives chapter of the *Handbook*.

The *Handbook* states the following with regard to the educational requirements of Top Executive positions, including General and Operations Manager positions:

Many top executives have a bachelor's or master's degree in business administration or in an area related to their field of work. College presidents and school superintendents typically have a doctoral degree in the field in which they originally taught or in education administration. Top executives in the public sector often have a degree in business administration, public administration, law, or the liberal arts. Top executives of large corporations often have a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

Top executives who are promoted from lower level managerial or supervisory positions within their own firm often can substitute experience for education. In

industries such as retail trade or transportation, for example, people without a college degree may work their way up to higher levels within the company and become executives or general managers.

*Id.* at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/top-executives.htm#tab-4>.

These statements from the *Handbook* do not indicate that a bachelor's degree or the equivalent, in a specific specialty, is normally required for entry into the occupational group within which the proffered position falls. Instead, the *Handbook* finds that these positions generally impose no specific degree requirement on individuals seeking employment. The statement that "many" top executives, which include general and operations managers, have college degrees is not synonymous with the "normally required" standard imposed by this criterion. To the contrary, such a statement does not even necessarily indicate that a majority of top executives possess such a degree. While the *Handbook* indicates that top management positions may be filled by individuals with a broad range of degrees, its subsequent discussion of the training and education necessary for such employment clearly states that companies also hire executives based on lower-level experience within their own organizations or management experience with another business. Moreover, the *Handbook* does not state that those positions which do require a bachelor's degree or the equivalent require that the degree be in a specific specialty.

Nor does the record of proceeding contain any persuasive documentary evidence from any other relevant authoritative source establishing that the proffered position's inclusion in the general and operations manager category is sufficient in and of itself to establish the proffered position as, in the words of this criterion, a "particular position" for which "[a] baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry."

Finally, it is noted that the petitioner submitted an LCA certified for a wage-level that is only appropriate for a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within its occupation, which signifies that the beneficiary is only expected to possess a basic understanding of the occupation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* (available at [http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/Policy\\_Nonag\\_Progs.pdf](http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/Policy_Nonag_Progs.pdf) (last accessed Jun. 21, 2013)) issued by DOL states the following with regard to Level I wage rates:

**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 [emphasis in original].

As the evidence of record does not establish that the particular position here proffered is one for which the normal minimum entry requirement is a baccalaureate or higher degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty, the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1).

Next, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not satisfied 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 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)).

As already discussed, the petitioner has not established that its proffered position is one for which the *Handbook*, or any other authoritative, objective, and reliable resource, reports a standard industry-wide requirement of at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

Also, there are no submissions from professional associations, individuals, or similar firms in the petitioner's industry attesting that individuals employed in positions parallel to the proffered position are routinely required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into those positions. Nor does the record contain any other evidence establishing 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.

The petitioner has not demonstrated that a requirement of a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is common to the petitioner's industry in parallel positions among similar organizations, and has not, therefore, satisfied the first alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

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The proposed duties' level of complexity, uniqueness, and specialization, as well as the level of independent judgment and occupational understanding required to perform them, are questionable, as the petitioner submitted an LCA certified for a Level I, entry-level position. The LCA's wage-level indicates that the proffered position is actually a low-level, entry position relative to others within the occupation. In accordance with the relevant DOL explanatory information on wage levels, this wage rate indicates that the beneficiary is only required to possess a basic understanding of the occupation; that she will be expected to perform routine tasks requiring limited, if any, exercise of judgment; that she will be closely supervised and her work closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that she will receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results.

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

The record contains no evidence that would differentiate the work of the proffered position from the work of top executive or general and operations managers in general. The duties which collectively constitute the proffered position (such as planning, directing and implementing a business plan; administering fiscal operations; establishing work schedules and assignments for staff; overseeing administrative activities; and directing and coordinating business-related activities) are described in terms of functions common to general and operations manager positions in general, and so have not been shown to be more complex or unique than the duties of other general and operations manager positions, some of which, the *Handbook* indicates, do not require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

Further, as was also noted above, the LCA submitted in support of the visa petition is approved for a Level I general and operations manager position, an indication that the proffered position is an entry-level position for an employee who has only a basic understanding of general and operations management. This does not support the proposition that the proffered position is so complex or unique that it can only be performed by a person with a specific bachelor's degree, notwithstanding that the *Handbook* suggests that some top executive positions, including general and operations manager positions do not require such a degree.

For both reasons, the petitioner has not satisfied the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

The AAO turns next to the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3), which entails an employer demonstrating that it normally requires a bachelor's degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty for the position.

The AAO's review of the record of proceeding under this criterion necessarily includes whatever evidence the petitioner has submitted with regard to its past recruiting and hiring practices and employees who previously held the position in question.

To satisfy this criterion, the record must contain documentary evidence demonstrating that the petitioner has a history of requiring the degree or degree equivalency, in a specific specialty, in its prior recruiting and hiring for the position. 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 the performance requirements of the proffered position.<sup>4</sup> In the instant case, the record does not establish

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<sup>4</sup> Any such assertion would be undermined in this particular case by the fact that the petitioner indicated in the LCA that its proffered position is a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within its occupation.

a prior history of recruiting and hiring for the proposed position only persons with at least a bachelor's degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty.

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 employer 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 387. In other words, if a petitioner's assertion of a particular degree requirement is not necessitated by the actual performance requirements of the proffered position, the position 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 at 387. 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 a 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 proposed 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.

As the petitioner has failed to demonstrate a history of recruiting and hiring only individuals with a bachelor's degree, or the equivalent, in a specific specialty for the proffered position, it has failed to satisfy 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3).

Next, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4), which requires the petitioner to establish that the nature of the proffered 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 a specific specialty.

Both on its own terms and also in comparison with the three higher wage-levels that can be designated in an LCA, the petitioner's designation of an LCA wage-level I is indicative of duties of relatively low complexity.

As earlier noted, the *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* issued by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) states the following with regard to Level I wage rates:

**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 [emphasis in original].

The pertinent guidance from the Department of Labor, at page 7 of its *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* describes the next higher wage-level as follows:

**Level II** (qualified) wage rates are assigned to job offers for qualified employees who have attained, either through education or experience, a good understanding of the occupation. They perform moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment. An indicator that the job request warrants a wage determination at Level II would be a requirement for years of education and/or experience that are generally required as described in the O\*NET Job Zones.

The above descriptive summary indicates that even this higher-than-designated wage level is appropriate for only "moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment." The fact that this higher-than-here-assigned, Level II wage rate itself indicates performance of only "moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment," is very telling with regard to the relatively low level of complexity imputed to the proffered position by virtue of its Level I wage-rate designation.

Further, the AAO notes the relatively low level of complexity that even this Level II wage-level reflects when compared with the two still-higher LCA wage levels, neither of which was designated on the LCA submitted to support this petition.

The aforementioned *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* describes the Level III wage designation as follows:

**Level III** (experienced) wage rates are assigned to job offers for experienced employees who have a sound understanding of the occupation and have attained, either through education or experience, special skills or knowledge. They perform tasks that require exercising judgment and may coordinate the activities of other staff. They may have supervisory authority over those staff. A requirement for years of experience or educational degrees that are at the higher ranges indicated in the O\*NET Job Zones would be indicators that a Level III wage should be considered.

Frequently, key words in the job title can be used as indicators that an employer's job offer is for an experienced worker. . . .

The *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* describes the Level IV wage designation as follows:

**Level IV** (fully competent) wage rates are assigned to job offers for competent employees who have sufficient experience in the occupation to plan and conduct work requiring judgment and the independent evaluation, selection, modification, and application of standard procedures and techniques. Such employees use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems. These employees receive only technical guidance and their work is reviewed only for application of sound judgment and effectiveness in meeting the establishment's procedures and expectations. They generally have management and/or supervisory responsibilities.

Here the AAO again incorporates its earlier discussion and analysis regarding the implications of the petitioner's submission of an LCA certified for the lowest assignable wage-level. By virtue of this submission the petitioner effectively attested that the proffered position is a low-level, entry position relative to others within the occupation, and that, as clear by comparison with DOL's instructive comments about the next higher level (Level II), the proffered position did not even involve "moderately complex tasks that require limited judgment" (the level of complexity noted for the next higher wage-level, Level II).

The AAO also finds that, separate and apart from the petitioner's submission of an LCA with a wage-level I designation, the petitioner has also failed to provide sufficiently detailed documentary evidence to establish that the nature of the specific duties that would be performed if this petition were approved 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.

Again, relative specialization and complexity have not been sufficiently developed by the petitioner as an aspect of the proffered position's duties. Reviewing financial performance data, establishing and implementing policies, goals, objectives, and procedures; conferring with staff members; determining staffing requirements; interviewing, hiring, and training new employees; planning and directing sales promotions and other activities; determining the services to be offered, and setting competitive prices and credit terms; establishing rapport with vendors and suppliers; looking for new market opportunities; and promoting the petitioner's services in various venues contain no indication of a nature so specialized and complex that the position would require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. In other words, the proposed duties have not been described with sufficient specificity to show that they are more specialized and complex than the duties of general and operations manager positions that are not usually associated with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

For the reasons discussed above, the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

(b)(6)

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As the petitioner has not satisfied at least one of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), it cannot be found that the proffered position is a specialty occupation. Accordingly, the appeal will be dismissed and the petition will be denied on this basis.

In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

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