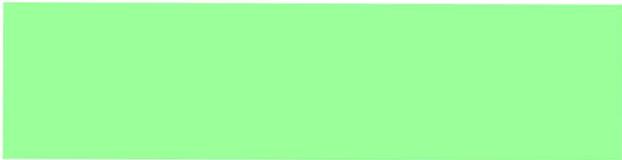


(b)(6)



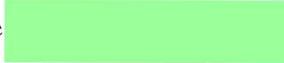
U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services



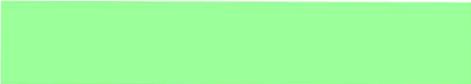
DATE: NOV 27 2013

Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

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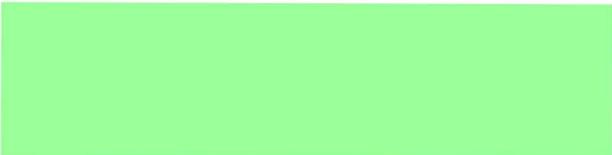


IN RE: Petitioner:
Beneficiary:



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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Rosenberg".

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 19, 2012. On the Form I-129 petition, the petitioner describes itself as retail business¹ established in 2007. In order to continue to employ the beneficiary in a position to which it assigned the job title of “accountant,” 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).

Upon reviewing the Form I-129 and the documentation submitted as support, the director issued a request for additional evidence (RFE). After reviewing the petitioner’s response to the RFE, the director denied the petition, finding that the petitioner failed to demonstrate that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation in accordance with the applicable statutory and regulatory provisions. The petitioner, through counsel, submitted a timely appeal of the decision. On appeal, counsel for the petitioner contends that the director’s basis for denial of the petition was erroneous. In support of this contention, counsel for the petitioner submits a brief and additional evidence.

The record of proceeding before the AAO contains: (1) the petitioner’s Form I-129 and supporting documentation; (2) the director’s RFE; (3) the petitioner’s response to the RFE; (4) the director’s notice denying the petition; and (5) the petitioner’s Form I-290B and supporting documentation. The AAO reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing its decision.

For the reasons that will be discussed below, the AAO agrees 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.

The issue before the AAO is whether the petitioner’s 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 applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.

¹ The petitioner provided a North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Code of 447110, “Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores.” This NAICS Code states 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.

I. Procedural History

The petitioner indicated on the Form I-129 and supporting documentation that it seeks the beneficiary's services in a position that it designates as an "accountant" to work on a full-time basis at a salary of \$44,595 per year.

As the Labor Condition Application (LCA) for this petition, the petitioner submitted an LCA that had been certified for use with a job prospect within the occupational classification of "Accountants and Auditors," – SOC (ONET/OES) code 13-2011.00, at a Level I (entry level) wage.

In a support letter, dated September 13, 2012, the petitioner states that the beneficiary's duties in the proffered position 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 statements;
- (iv) auditing orders, contracts, individual transactions and preparing depreciation schedules to apply to capital assets;
- (v) preparing compliance reports for taxing authorities; and
- (vi) analyzing operating statements, reviewing cost control programs, and making strategy recommendations to management.

In the support letter, the petitioner states the following regarding the minimum requirements of the proffered position:

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, Finance, or a related field.

The petitioner further stated that "[the beneficiary] received his Master of Business Administration with concentration in Finance from [redacted]."

Upon review of the documentation, the director found the evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought and issued an RFE. The director noted that the petitioner submitted an extension petition and stated that "if [the petitioner's] previous petition was approved based upon the same evidence contained in this record, the approval would constitute gross USCIS error." The director requested that the petitioner provide evidence to establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation including, that a bachelor's degree in a specific field of study is required to perform the duties of the position, and that the beneficiary

will not be performing non-qualifying duties due to the small number of individuals that the petitioner employs.² The director's RFE also noted that the proffered position, as described by the petitioner, appeared to be that of a bookkeeper, accounting and auditing clerk rather than an accountant. The director outlined some of the specific types of evidence that could be submitted. Counsel for the petitioner responded to the RFE and submitted the petitioner's response letter and additional evidence. In the letter submitted in response to the RFE, dated January 15, 2013, counsel stated the following:

Since 2009, [the beneficiary] has performed the Accountant job duties for the Petitioner. Due to [the] complexity of the voluminous transactions taking place, [the petitioner] strongly believes that continuing to have an in-house fulltime Accountant will be efficient, cost-effective and highly beneficial for the company. [The beneficiary's] responsibilities primarily include managing and directing the financial activities, rather than performing the day-to-day bookkeeping function. [The beneficiary] will continue to spend a majority of his time 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]. In addition to supervising individuals who perform routine bookkeeping services, [the beneficiary] will spend [the] bulk of his time in establishing operational and financial security procedures and advising upper management with cost saving and investment strategies.³

Counsel's letter in response to the RFE included the following breakdown of the duties of the proffered position, along with the percentage of time devoted to each duty:⁴

DESCRIPTION	TIME %
Compiling and analyzing financial information and preparing financial reports by applying principles of generally accepted accounting standards. Setting up policies and procedures and implement[ing] safe guards in check cashing operations to minimize financial losses and preparing entries and reconciling general ledger accounts, documenting transactions, and summarizing current and projected financial position.	35%
Maintaining payable and receivable records, detailing assets, liabilities,	20%

² The director's RFE also requested information regarding the identity of the petitioner and the beneficiary's prior nonimmigrant status; however, these issues were resolved and will not be addressed in this decision.

³ We note that while counsel asserts that the beneficiary supervises the individuals who perform the routine bookkeeping operations, the record does not contain evidence to support this assertion. Furthermore, as the petitioner claims to only employ six individuals, including the beneficiary, it is unclear how the petitioner's business could support numerous bookkeeping positions in addition to the position held by the beneficiary.

⁴ The duties listed in bold are those that were not included in the petitioner's original description of the position.

capital, and preparing detailed balance sheet, profit & loss, and cash flow statement. Analyzing the Company's liquidity and capital accounts to ensure proper company funding.	
Auditing orders, contracts, individual transactions and preparing depreciation schedules to apply to capital assets[.]	10%
Preparing compliance reports for tax authorities and reconciling cash and sales reports, prepare cash flow statements and deposits.	10%
Analyzing operating statements, review cost control programs, and make strategy recommendations to management.	25%

After reviewing the RFE response, the director denied the petition. Although the petitioner 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. Counsel submitted a timely appeal of the denial of the H-1B petition.

On appeal, counsel submits a brief that is largely duplicative of that submitted in response to the director's RFE, along with copies of tax returns that had been previously entered into the record. Counsel provides another breakdown of the position's duties and states the percentage of time to be spent on each job duty, as follows:

DESCRIPTION	TIME %
Compiling and analyzing financial information and preparing financial reports by applying generally accepted accounting standards[.]	30%
Preparing entries and reconciling general ledger, maintaining payable and receivable records, detailing assets, liabilities, capital, and preparing detailed balance sheet, profit, loss, and cash flow statement[.]	20%
Auditing orders, contracts, individual transactions and preparing depreciation schedules to apply to capital assets[.]	5%
Preparing compliance reports for tax authorities[.]	10%
Reconciling cash and sales reports, prepare cash flow statements and deposits[.]	10%
Analyzing operating statements, review cost control programs, and make strategy recommendations to management[.]	25%

II. The Law

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 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), 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.

III. Analysis

The AAO 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, the AAO agrees with the director and finds that the evidence fails to establish that the position as described constitutes a specialty occupation.

To make its determination whether the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation, the AAO turns to the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

It is important for the petitioner to understand that the fact that a person may be employed in a position designated as that of an accountant and may apply accounting principles in the course of his or her job is not in itself sufficient to establish the position as one that qualifies as a specialty occupation. Thus, it is incumbent on the petitioner to provide sufficient evidence to establish that the particular position that it proffers here would necessitate accounting services at a level requiring the theoretical and practical application of at least a bachelor's degree level of knowledge in accounting. This, the petitioner has failed to do.

The AAO finds that, as reflected in the duty descriptions quoted above in this decision, the petitioner describes the duties of the proffered position in terms of generalized and generic functions, which, the AAO finds, do not convey either the substantive nature of either the specific matters upon which the beneficiary would focus or the practical and theoretical level of accounting knowledge that the beneficiary would have to apply to those matters. The AAO will provide a few illustrative examples.

While the petitioner claims that 30% of the beneficiary's time will be devoted to “[c]ompiling and analyzing financial information and preparing financial reports by applying principles of generally accepted accounting standards,” the petitioner provides neither substantive information about, nor documentary evidence illustrating, the nature of the “financial information” that the beneficiary would be “compiling and analyzing,” or the types of reports the beneficiary would prepare, the nature of the analysis that the beneficiary would have to apply, or particular

accounting applications that the beneficiary would employ. Likewise, the evidence of record sheds no light on the substantial nature of the “operating statements” that the petitioner says that the beneficiary would analyze, or on the “cost control programs” that the beneficiary is to review, or on the “strategy recommendations” that the beneficiary is to make. Also, the AAO notes that the petitioner fails to provide substantive evidence with regard to either the nature and level of analysis that the beneficiary would have to apply to the aforementioned operating statements, or with regard to the range and depth of “review” that the beneficiary would bring to bear upon the aforementioned cost control program, or with regard to any accounting dimensions of the strategy upon which the beneficiary would be required to make recommendations.

The record’s descriptions of the proposed duties and the position that they are said to comprise are not sufficiently detailed and concrete to establish either the duties or the proffered position as particularly complex, unique, and/or specialized. Rather, the AAO finds, the proffered position, and its constituent duties, are described in terms of relatively abstract and generalized functions, that, as such, do not demonstrate whatever academic and/or experience derived level of accounting knowledge the beneficiary would have to apply to the petitioner’s business matters if this petition were approved.

As the evidence in this record of proceeding does not establish the educational attainment actually required to perform the proffered position, the petitioner failed to satisfy any criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A). Accordingly, the appeal must be dismissed, and the petition denied.

The petitioner should note that because they bear upon the AAO’s analyses of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) that follow below, the above findings and comments with regard to the evidentiary deficiencies in this record of proceeding should be deemed incorporated into this decision’s treatment of each of those criteria.

The AAO will first review the record of proceeding in relation to the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(I), which requires that a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position that is the subject of the petition.

When determining whether a position is a specialty occupation, the AAO must look at the nature of the business offering the employment and the description of the specific duties of the position as it relates to the particular employer. To ascertain the intent of a petitioner, USCIS looks 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.”

The petitioner stated that the beneficiary would be employed in an accountant position. However, to determine whether a particular job qualifies as a specialty occupation, USCIS does not simply rely on a position’s title. As previously mentioned, 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 evidence in the record of proceeding establishes that performance of the particular proffered 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.

The AAO recognizes the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)* as an authoritative source on the duties and educational requirements of the wide variety of occupations that it addresses.⁵ As previously discussed, the petitioner asserts in the LCA that the proffered position falls within the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors." The director found that the position offered falls under the occupational category "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks." The AAO reviewed the chapter of the *Handbook* entitled "Accountants and Auditors," including the sections regarding the typical duties and requirements for this occupational category.⁶ The AAO also reviewed the chapter of the *Handbook* entitled "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks," including the sections regarding the typical duties and requirements for this occupational category.⁷ Although the petitioner titled the position "accountant," upon review of the job description provided by the petitioner and the totality of the evidence in the record of proceeding, the AAO finds that the proffered position most closely aligns with the occupational classification of "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks." However, as will now be discussed, the *Handbook* does not indicate that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into either of these occupational groups. Accordingly, the proffered position's inclusion in either of these occupational groups would not be in itself sufficient to satisfy this first criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), that is, by establishing that the particular position that is the subject of this petition is one that requires for entry at least a bachelor's degree, or its equivalent, in a specific specialty.

More specifically, the subchapter of the *Handbook* entitled "What Accountants and Auditors Do" states the following about this occupational category:

⁵ The *Handbook*, which is available in printed form, may also be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>. The AAO's references to the *Handbook* are to the 2012-2013 edition available online.

⁶ For additional information regarding the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors," see U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 ed.*, Accountants and Auditors, available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).

⁷ For additional information regarding the occupational category "Bookkeeping, Accounting, or Auditing Clerks," see *id.*, Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks, available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/office-and-administrative-support/bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).

Accountants and auditors prepare and examine financial records. They ensure that financial records are accurate and that taxes are paid properly and on time. Accountants and auditors assess financial operations and work to help ensure that organizations run efficiently.

Duties

Accountants and auditors typically do the following:

- Examine financial statements to be sure that they are accurate and comply with laws and regulations
- Compute taxes owed, prepare tax returns, and ensure that taxes are paid properly and on time
- Inspect account books and accounting systems for efficiency and use of accepted accounting procedures
- Organize and maintain financial records
- Assess financial operations and make best-practices recommendations to management
- Suggest ways to reduce costs, enhance revenues, and improve profits

In addition to examining and preparing financial documentation, accountants and auditors must explain their findings. This includes face-to-face meetings with organization managers and individual clients, and preparing written reports.

Many accountants and auditors specialize, depending on the particular organization that they work for. Some organizations specialize in assurance services (improving the quality or context of information for decision makers) or risk management (determining the probability of a misstatement on financial documentation). Other organizations specialize in specific industries, such as healthcare.

Some workers with a background in accounting and auditing teach in colleges and universities. For more information, see the profile on postsecondary teachers.

The four main types of accountants and auditors are the following:

Public accountants do a broad range of accounting, auditing, tax, and consulting tasks. Their clients include corporations, governments, and individuals.

They work with financial documents that clients are required by law to disclose. These include tax forms and balance sheet statements that corporations must provide potential investors. For example, some public accountants concentrate on tax matters, advising corporations about the tax advantages of certain business decisions or preparing individual income tax returns.

External auditors review clients' financial statements and inform investors and authorities that the statements have been correctly prepared and reported.

Public accountants, many of whom are Certified Public Accountants (CPAs), generally have their own businesses or work for public accounting firms.

Some public accountants specialize in forensic accounting, investigating financial crimes, such as securities fraud and embezzlement, bankruptcies and contract disputes, and other complex and possibly criminal financial transactions. Forensic accountants combine their knowledge of accounting and finance with law and investigative techniques to determine if an activity is illegal. Many forensic accountants work closely with law enforcement personnel and lawyers during investigations and often appear as expert witnesses during trials.

Management accountants, also called cost, managerial, industrial, corporate, or private accountants, record and analyze the financial information of the organizations for which they work. The information that management accountants prepare is intended for internal use by business managers, not by the general public.

They often work on budgeting and performance evaluation. They may also help organizations plan the cost of doing business. Some may work with financial managers on asset management, which involves planning and selecting financial investments such as stocks, bonds, and real estate.

Government accountants maintain and examine the records of government agencies and audit private businesses and individuals whose activities are subject to government regulations or taxation. Accountants employed by federal, state, and local governments ensure that revenues are received and spent in accordance with laws and regulations.

Internal auditors check for mismanagement of an organization's funds. They identify ways to improve the processes for finding and eliminating waste and fraud. The practice of internal auditing is not regulated, but the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) provides generally accepted standards.

Information technology auditors are internal auditors who review controls for their organization's computer systems, to ensure that the financial data comes from a reliable source.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 ed.*, Accountants and Auditors, available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-2> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).

The narrative of the *Handbook* indicates that government accountants work in the public sector, and internal auditors check for mismanagement, waste or fraud. These descriptions of accountants clearly do not apply to the proffered position. Moreover, under the *Handbook's* description, it appears to be unusual for small businesses to employ a public accountant, since

public accountants are usually Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) with their own business or employed by accounting firms.

The *Handbook* reports that certification may be advantageous or even required for some accountant positions. However, there is no indication in the record of proceeding that the petitioner requires the beneficiary to have obtained the designation 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, graduates of community colleges, 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.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 ed.*, Accountants and Auditors, available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Business-and-Financial/Accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-4> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).

The *Handbook* reports that some graduates from junior colleges or business or correspondence schools, 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. That is, the *Handbook* reports that 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. Therefore, 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 accountant jobs normally requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.⁸ More specifically, "most" is not indicative that a position normally requires at least a

⁸ 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 need at least a bachelor's degree, it could be said that "most" of the positions need 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. 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,

bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, (the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1)), 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.

The director reviewed the petitioner's job description and supporting evidence and found that the duties of the proffered position most closely resemble those described in the chapter "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks" of the *Handbook*. As will now be discussed, the *Handbook* also does not indicate that bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing 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 its equivalent.

The subchapter of the *Handbook* entitled "What Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks Do" states the following about this occupational category:

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks produce financial records for organizations. They record financial transactions, update statements, and check financial records for accuracy.

Duties

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks typically do the following:

- Use bookkeeping software as well as online spreadsheets and databases
- Enter (post) financial transactions into the appropriate computer software
- Receive and record cash, checks, and vouchers
- Put costs (debits) as well as income (credits) into the software, assigning each to an appropriate account
- Produce reports, such as balance sheets (costs compared to income), income statements, and totals by account
- Check figures, postings, and reports for accuracy
- Reconcile or note and report any differences they find in the records

The records that bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks work with include expenditures (money spent), receipts (money that comes in), accounts payable (bills to be paid), accounts receivable (invoices, or what other people owe the organization), and profit and loss (a report that shows the organization's financial health).

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." § 214(i)(1) of the Act.

Workers in this occupation have a wide range of tasks. Some in this occupation are full-charge bookkeeping clerks who maintain an entire organization's books. Others are accounting clerks who handle specific tasks.

These clerks use basic mathematics (adding, subtracting) throughout the day.

As organizations continue to computerize their financial records, many bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks use specialized accounting software, spreadsheets, and databases. Most clerks now enter information from receipts or bills into computers, and the information is then stored electronically. They must be comfortable using computers to record and calculate data.

The widespread use of computers also has enabled bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks to take on additional responsibilities, such as payroll, billing, purchasing (buying), and keeping track of overdue bills. Many of these functions require clerks to communicate with clients.

Bookkeeping clerks, also known as bookkeepers, often are responsible for some or all of an organization's accounts, known as the general ledger. They record all transactions and post debits (costs) and credits (income).

They also produce financial statements and other reports for supervisors and managers. Bookkeepers prepare bank deposits by compiling data from cashiers, verifying receipts, and sending cash, checks, or other forms of payment to the bank.

In addition, they may handle payroll, make purchases, prepare invoices, and keep track of overdue accounts.

Accounting clerks typically work for larger companies and have more specialized tasks. Their titles, such as accounts payable clerk or accounts receivable clerk, often reflect the type of accounting they do.

Often, their responsibilities vary by level of experience. Entry-level accounting clerks may enter (post) details of transactions (including date, type, and amount), add up accounts, and determine interest charges. They also may monitor loans and accounts to ensure that payments are up to date.

More advanced accounting clerks may add up and balance billing vouchers, ensure that account data is complete and accurate, and code documents according to an organization's procedures.

Auditing clerks check figures, postings, and documents to ensure that they are mathematically accurate and properly coded. They also correct or note errors for accountants or other workers to fix.

Id., Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks, available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/office-and-administrative-support/bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).

The *Handbook* provides the following information in the subsection entitled "How to Become a Bookkeeping, Accounting, or Auditing Clerk" for this occupational category:

Most bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks need a high school diploma, and they usually learn some of their skills on the job. They must have basic math and computer skills, including knowledge of spreadsheets and bookkeeping software.

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. In 2009, 25 percent of these workers had an associate's or higher degree.

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.

Id., Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks, available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Office-and-Administrative-Support/Bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm#tab-4> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).

The AAO notes that the *Handbook* does not report that "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks" comprise an occupational group for which normally the minimum requirement for entry is 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 (and that in 2009, about 25 percent of these workers had an associate's or higher degree). The *Handbook* further reports that workers usually receive on-the-job training. The *Handbook* does not indicate that at least a baccalaureate degree

in a specific specialty (or its equivalent), is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation.⁹

In response to the RFE, counsel provided a copy of the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) OnLine Summary Report for the occupation "Accountants," as supporting the assertion that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. Nevertheless, the AAO reviewed the report but finds that the petitioner and counsels' reliance on the report is misplaced.

The AAO will now discuss O*NET's SVP rating of "7.0 < 8.0" for the occupation of "Accountant." The AAO finds that an assignment of an SVP rating of 7.0 to 8.0 is not indicative of a specialty occupation. This is obvious upon reading Section II of the *DOT's* Appendix C, Components of the Definition Trailer, which addresses the SVP rating system.¹⁰ The section reads:

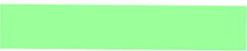
II. SPECIFIC VOCATIONAL PREPARATION (SVP)

Specific Vocational Preparation is defined as the amount of lapsed time required by a typical worker to learn the techniques, acquire the information, and develop the facility needed for average performance in a specific job-worker situation.

This training may be acquired in a school, work, military, institutional, or vocational environment. It does not include the orientation time required of a fully qualified worker to become accustomed to the special conditions of any new job. Specific vocational training includes: vocational education, apprenticeship training, in-plant training, on-the-job training, and essential experience in other jobs.

⁹ In the RFE, the director noted that it was not clear how the beneficiary would be relieved from performing non-qualifying functions. However, while counsel stated that "[t]here are other employees that carry out the non-qualifying functions such as administrative work," the petitioner and counsel did not satisfactorily address this issue in the response. Furthermore, 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). Thus, there is no evidence how the beneficiary would be relieved from performing non-qualifying tasks, such as the company's general, financial record keeping, recording the petitioner's financial transactions, updating statements, and checking financial records for accuracy (all duties of a bookkeeper and/or accounting clerk). Based upon the petitioner's job description and the totality of the evidence presented about the proffered position and the petitioner's business, the AAO finds that it does not appear that the petitioner has established that the beneficiary's work would require the practical and theoretical application of accounting knowledge above that required for bookkeepers, accounting, and auditing clerks.

¹⁰ The Appendix's site is <http://www.oalj.dol.gov/PUBLIC/DOT/REFERENCES/DOTAPPC.HTM> (last visited Nov. 26, 2013).



Specific vocational training includes training given in any of the following circumstances:

- a. Vocational education (high school; commercial or shop training; technical school; art school; and that part of college training which is organized around a specific vocational objective);
- b. Apprenticeship training (for apprenticeable jobs only);
- c. In-plant training (organized classroom study provided by an employer);
- d. On-the-job training (serving as learner or trainee on the job under the instruction of a qualified worker);
- e. Essential experience in other jobs (serving in less responsible jobs which lead to the higher grade job or serving in other jobs which qualify).

The following is an explanation of the various levels of specific vocational preparation:

Level	Time
1	Short demonstration only
2	Anything beyond short demonstration up to and including 1 month
3	Over 1 month up to and including 3 months
4	Over 3 months up to and including 6 months
5	Over 6 months up to and including 1 year
6	Over 1 year up to and including 2 years
7	Over 2 years up to and including 4 years
8	Over 4 years up to and including 10 years
9	Over 10 years

Note: The levels of this scale are mutually exclusive and do not overlap.

Thus, an SVP rating of 7 through 8 does not indicate that at least a four-year bachelor's degree is required, or more importantly, that such a degree must be in a specific specialty closely related to the requirements of that occupation. Therefore, the SVP information is not probative of the proffered position being a specialty occupation.

Furthermore, O*NET assigns this occupation a Job Zone Four rating, which groups it among occupations that are described as follows: "[m]ost of these occupations require a four-year bachelor's degree, but **some do not**" (emphasis added). O*NET does not report that for those occupations with an academic degree requirement, that such a degree must be in a specific specialty directly related to the occupation. As previously discussed, 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 duties and responsibilities of the position. Further, as previously explained, "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)(1)), 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)). Notably, O*NET indicates that some of these occupations do not require a four-year bachelor's degree.

When, as here, the *Handbook* does not support the proposition that the proffered position satisfies this first criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), it is incumbent upon the petitioner to provide persuasive evidence that the proffered position otherwise satisfies the criterion, notwithstanding the absence of the *Handbook's* support on the issue. In such case, it is the petitioner's responsibility to provide probative evidence (e.g., documentation from other authoritative sources) that supports a favorable finding with regard to this criterion. 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." 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. at 165 (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. at 190).

In response to the RFE and on appeal, counsel cited to several decisions. First, the AAO notes that counsel errs in the status that he attributes to what he cites as "*In Re X*, LIN93 245 51412, 12 Imm. Rptr. B2-200 (AAU, Int. Dec. March 28, 1994)." Contrary to counsel's description, that decision has not been published as a precedent decision. For a list of the precedent decisions, see the Executive Office of Immigration Review Internet site at http://www.justice.gov/eoir/vll/intdec/ao_comm.html. While 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c) provides that AAO precedent decisions are binding on all USCIS employees in the administration of the Act, unpublished decisions are not similarly binding.¹¹

Also, counsel's reliance upon *Hong Kong T.V. Video Program, Inc. v. Ilchert*, 685 F. Supp. 712 (N.D. CA. 1988), cited as holding that "[a] position may be considered a profession based on the complexity of the duties alone," is not relevant. The visa classification which that decision addressed (that is, for a temporary worker of "distinguished merit and ability" pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)) predated the H-1B visa classification for temporary workers in a specialty occupation, which is addressed at section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).¹²

Furthermore, that case dealt with whether the beneficiaries were members of the professions as defined in section 101(a)(32) of the Act. The issue before the AAO, however, is whether the petitioner's proffered position qualifies as a nonimmigrant H-1B specialty occupation and not whether it is a profession. Moreover, *Hong Kong T.V. Video Program, Inc. v. Ilchert*, does not have precedential status with regard to the matter now before the AAO. In this regard, the AAO

¹¹ As an administrative comment, the AAO notes that, aside from the fact that the referenced decision carries no precedential weight, the petitioner did not include a copy of the decision for the AAO's review.

¹² The AAO notes that the applicable language from *Hong Kong T.V. Video Program, Inc. v. Ilchert* states that "the position of *company president* may be considered a profession based on the complexity of the duties alone." *Hong Kong T.V. Video Program, Inc. v. Ilchert*, 685 F. Supp. at 716. (Emphasis added.)

also notes that, in contrast to the broad precedential authority of the case law of a United States circuit court, the AAO is not bound to follow the published decision of a United States district court in matters arising even within the same district. *See Matter of K-S-*, 20 I&N Dec. 715 (BIA 1993). Although the reasoning underlying a district judge's decision will be given due consideration when it is properly before the AAO, the analysis does not have to be followed as a matter of law. *Id.* at 719.

Also, counsel states that “. . . certain occupations develop faster than educational institutions can develop degree programs. These occupations have been found to be professions or specialty occupations in transition,” and cites to *Matter of Carron* [sic] *International, Inc.*, as Int. Dec. 3085 (BIA October 22, 1988).¹³ The AAO finds that the proposition that counsel cites is not relevant here, as accounting degrees are widely available at many educational institutions.

On appeal, counsel also stated that the “[f]ollowing are some of the related occupations that have been recognized as specialty occupations” and included a table, as follows:

Occupation	Case Name	Education/Experience
Accountant	<i>Matter of Arjani</i> , 12 I&N Dec. 649 (R.S. 1967[])	degree is sufficient
Accountant	<i>The Button Depot, Inc. v. DHS</i> , 386 F.Supp. 2d 1140 (C.D. Cal. 2005)	Denial reversed where DHS abused its discretion by failing to apply the relevant standards regarding an equivalent foreign degree in business administration as meeting the industry standard.
Accountant	<i>Matter of Doultsinos</i> , 12 I&N Dec. 153 (DD 1957)	degree is sufficient
Investment Analyst	<i>Matter of Tight Knot, Inc.</i> , LIN 99 089 51751 (AAO Jun. 20, 2000), reported in 77 Interpreter Releases 1292-93 (Sep. 1, 2000)	degree is sufficient

The AAO finds that the petitioner and counsel have not presented evidence and persuasive argument to establish that the facts of the instant petition are analogous to those in any of the aforementioned decisions. Also, the AAO notes that the decision in *The Button Depot, Inc. v. DHS* does not have precedential status with regard to the matter now before the AAO. As previously stated in the instant matter, in contrast to the broad precedential authority of the case law of a United States circuit court, the AAO is not bound to follow the published decision of a

¹³ The AAO notes that *Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791 (Comm'r 1988) was decided by the Commissioner on October 28, 1988, and not on October 22, 1988.

United States district court in matters arising even within the same district. *See Matter of K-S-*, 20 I&N Dec. at 715. Although the reasoning underlying a district judge's decision will be given due consideration when it is properly before the AAO, the analysis does not have to be followed as a matter of law. *Id.* at 719. Moreover, the AAO notes that the decision in *Matter of Tight Knot, Inc.* has not been published as a precedent decision. As previously noted, while 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c) provides that AAO precedent decisions are binding on all USCIS employees in the administration of the Act, unpublished decisions are not similarly binding.

Furthermore, *Matter of Doultsinos* and *Matter of Arjani* dealt with whether the beneficiaries were members of the professions as defined in section 101(a)(32) of the Act. However, the issue before the AAO in the instant case is whether the petitioner's proffered position qualifies as a nonimmigrant H-1B specialty occupation and not whether it is a profession. Thus, these precedent decisions can be distinguished from the present matter.

For the foregoing reasons, the AAO finds that the aforementioned decisions are neither persuasive nor instructive with regard to the application of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to the facts before the AAO in this appeal.

Upon review of the totality of the evidence in the entire record of proceeding, the AAO concludes that the petitioner has not established that the proffered position falls under an occupational category for which the *Handbook*, or other authoritative source, indicates that a requirement for at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally required for entry into the occupation. Furthermore, the duties and requirements of the proffered position, as described in the record of proceeding, do not indicate that the particular position that is the subject of this petition 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 first criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A).

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 first alternative prong 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 an industry-wide requirement for at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Thus, the AAO incorporates by reference its previous discussion on the matter. The AAO notes that the record of proceeding does not contain any 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. Finally, for the reasons discussed in greater detail below, the petitioner's reliance upon the job vacancy advertisements is misplaced.

In support of its assertion that the degree requirement is common to the petitioner's industry in parallel positions among similar organizations, the petitioner submitted copies of 27 advertisements as evidence that its degree requirement is standard amongst its peer organizations for parallel positions in the retail industry.

In order for the petitioner to establish that another organization is similar, it must demonstrate that the petitioner and the organization share the same general characteristics. Here, the petitioner submits no evidence demonstrating that any of the advertising companies are similar in size and scope to that of the petitioner, a six-person retail business. Thus, the record is devoid of sufficient information regarding the advertising companies to conduct a meaningful comparison of each of these firms to the petitioner. Without such evidence, job advertisements 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 another organization share the same general characteristics, 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) may be considered. It is not sufficient for the petitioner to claim that the organizations are similar and in the same industry without providing a legitimate basis for such an assertion. 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. at 165 (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190).

The petitioner did not provide any independent evidence of how representative these job advertisements are of the particular advertising employers' recruiting history for the type of jobs advertised. Further, as they are only solicitations for hire, they are not evidence of the employers' actual hiring practices. Upon review of the documents, the AAO finds that they are not probative evidence that a requirement for a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common to the petitioner's industry in similar organizations for positions parallel to the proffered position.

For instance, the advertisements include a position with [REDACTED] described in the advertisement as "a leading national retailer of innovative mobile technology products and services, as well as products related to personal and home technology and power supply needs." The advertisement further states that "[REDACTED] employs . . . approximately 34,000 . . . sales experts globally" and that its "retail network includes approximately 4,700 company-operated stores in the United States and Mexico, 1,500 wireless phone centers in the United States, and more than 1,100 dealer and franchise locations worldwide." Thus, [REDACTED] is not a similar organization to the petitioner and is not in the same industry. The petitioner and counsel also submitted advertisements for other organizations that do not appear to be similar to the petitioner or in the same industry such as the [REDACTED] (a leading specialty retailer of fashionable and contemporary apparel and accessory items), etc. Without further information, these advertisements appear to be for organizations dissimilar to the

petitioner and in different industries, and the petitioner has not provided any probative evidence to suggest otherwise.

Furthermore, the petitioner submitted job postings for which little or no information regarding the employer is provided. For example, the petitioner submitted a job posting for a senior tax accountant position in Oklahoma for an undisclosed client. Postings such as this lack information regarding the employer. Consequently, the record is devoid of sufficient information regarding the advertising organizations to conduct a meaningful comparison of the organizations to the petitioner. The petitioner failed to supplement the record of proceeding to establish that the advertising organizations are similar to it. That is, the petitioner has not provided any information regarding which aspects or traits (if any) it shares with the advertising organizations.

Moreover, some of the advertisements appear to be for more senior positions and/or do not appear to be for parallel positions. For instance, the accounting manager position advertised by [REDACTED] requires "15 years of experience in the areas of accounting and finance," a "Bachelor's Degree in Accounting," and "7+ years [of] experience at [the] manager level." Furthermore, some of the positions do not appear to have similar duties to the proffered position.

Additionally, contrary to the purpose for which the advertisements were submitted, some of the postings do not specify that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as required for the positions. For example, one of the advertisements states a requirement for a "BBA." Furthermore, some of the advertisements require a bachelor's degree without specifying a specific specialty. Finally, many of the advertisements that were copied from newspapers appear illegible.

Again, the advertisements submitted by the petitioner do not establish that the petitioner has met this prong of the regulations. Thus, 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.

Thus, for the reasons discussed above, the petitioner's reliance on the job vacancy advertisements is misplaced. As a result, the petitioner has not established that similar companies in the same industry routinely require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for parallel positions.¹⁴

¹⁴ 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 such a limited number of job 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 error").

As such, even if the job announcements supported the finding that the position of accountant at a retail business required a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, it cannot be found

Thus, based upon a complete review of the record, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not established that a requirement for at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common in the petitioner's industry for positions that are (1) parallel to the proffered position; and, (2) located in organizations similar to the petitioner. Accordingly, 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).

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 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.

As noted earlier, the AAO here incorporates, and adopts into the analysis of this prong, its earlier comments and findings with regard to the evidentiary deficiencies of the descriptions of the proposed duties and the position that they are said to comprise. As noted and reflected in those comments and findings, the petitioner has not sufficiently developed relative complexity or uniqueness as an aspect of the proffered position. Specifically, the petitioner failed to demonstrate how the accountant duties as described in this record of proceeding comprise a position that requires the theoretical and practical application of such an educational level of a body of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty that only a person with a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent can perform it.

The AAO also finds that the LCA submitted by the petitioner in support of the instant petition is materially inconsistent with a claim that the petitioner has established the relative complexity or uniqueness required to satisfy this second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

The AAO must note that the petitioner designated the proffered position as a Level I (entry level) position on the LCA.¹⁵ This designation is indicative of a comparatively low, entry-level

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.

¹⁵ Wage levels should be determined only after selecting the most relevant Occupational Information Network (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.

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) 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. DOL emphasizes that these guidelines should not be implemented in a mechanical fashion and that the wage level should be commensurate with the complexity of the tasks, independent judgment required, and amount of close supervision received.

position relative to others within the occupation.¹⁶ That is, in accordance with the relevant DOL explanatory information on wage levels, this Level I wage rate is only appropriate for a position in which the beneficiary is only required to have a basic understanding of the occupation and would be expected to perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. This wage rate also indicates that the beneficiary would be closely supervised; that his work would be closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that he would receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results.

By way of comparison, the AAO notes that a position classified at a Level IV (fully competent) position is designated by the DOL for employees who "use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems." Thus, the wage level designated by the petitioner in the LCA for the proffered position is not consistent with claims that the position would entail any particularly complex or unique duties or that the position itself would be so complex or unique as to require the services of a person with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty.

The record lacks sufficiently detailed information to distinguish the proffered position as more complex or unique than positions in the pertinent occupation that can be performed by persons without at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

Consequently, as the petitioner fails to demonstrate how the proffered position is so complex or unique relative to other accounting positions that can be performed by a person without at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into the occupation in the United States, the petitioner has not satisfied the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

Next, the petitioner did not submit evidence relating to the third criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), which entails an employer demonstrating that it normally requires a

See DOL, Employment and Training Administration's *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagricultural Immigration Programs (Rev. Nov. 2009), available on the Internet at: http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf.

¹⁶ The wage levels are defined in DOL's "Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance." A Level I wage rate is describes 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.

Id.

bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, for the position. Therefore, the petitioner has not satisfied the third criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A). Rather, counsel for the petitioner states that prior to employing the beneficiary, the petitioner used independent contractors to provide accounting services and that these "individuals had education and experience equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Accounting or Finance or a related degree . . ." However, 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). Furthermore, the independent contractors were not employees of the petitioner and therefore, the record of proceeding 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 the equivalent.¹⁷

The AAO notes that the petitioner claims that the duties of the proffered position can only be employed by a degreed individual. While a petitioner may believe or otherwise assert that a proffered position requires a degree in a specific specialty, 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 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 degree requirement is only symbolic and 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"). Here, the petitioner has failed to establish the referenced criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3) based on its normal hiring practices.

¹⁷ 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 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 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.

Finally, the petitioner has not satisfied the fourth criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), which is reserved for positions with specific duties so specialized and complex that their performance requires knowledge that is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

As noted earlier, the AAO here, too, incorporates, and adopts into the analysis of this prong, this decision's earlier comments and findings with regard to the evidentiary deficiencies of the descriptions of the proposed duties and the position that they are said to comprise. As reflected in those comments and findings, the evidence in this record of proceeding does not establish relative specialization and complexity as an aspect of the proffered position. That is, the proposed duties have not been described with sufficient specificity to establish their nature as more specialized and complex than the nature of the duties of other positions in the pertinent occupational category whose performance does not require the application of knowledge usually associated with attainment of at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

In this regard, the AAO here incorporates into this analysis its earlier comments and findings with regard to the implication of the Level I wage-rate designation (the lowest of four possible wage-levels) in the LCA. That is, that the proffered position's Level I wage designation is indicative of a low, entry-level position relative to others within the pertinent occupational category and hence one not likely distinguishable by relatively specialized and complex duties. As noted earlier, the DOL indicates that a Level I designation is appropriate for "beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation."

As the evidence in the record of proceeding has not established that the nature of the duties of the position is so specialized and complex that 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, the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

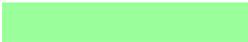
For the reasons related in the preceding discussion, the petitioner has failed to establish that it has satisfied any of the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) and, therefore, it cannot be found that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. The appeal will be dismissed and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

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 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004) (noting that the AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis).

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

The petition will be denied and the appeal dismissed for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for the decision. In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section

(b)(6)



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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.