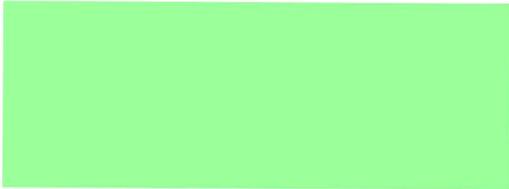


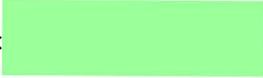
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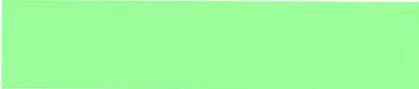
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Administrative Appeals Office (AAO)
20 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services



DATE: **APR 08 2014** OFFICE: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER FILE: 

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,

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 May 24, 2012. In the Form I-129 and supporting documents, the petitioner describes itself as a business engaged in multi-ventures established in 2000.¹ In order to employ the beneficiary in what it designates as an accountant position, the petitioner seeks to classify him as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

The director denied the petition on February 11, 2013 finding that the petitioner failed to establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation in accordance with the applicable statutory and regulatory provisions. On appeal, counsel asserts that the director's basis for denial of the petition was erroneous and contends that the petitioner satisfied all evidentiary requirements.

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

For the reasons that will be discussed below, the AAO agrees with the director's decision. Accordingly, the director's decision will not be disturbed. The appeal will be dismissed, and the petition will be denied.

I. Factual and Procedural History

In this matter, the petitioner stated in the Form I-129 that it seeks the beneficiary's services as an accountant to work on a part-time basis (20 to 30 hours a week) at an hourly wage of \$20.89. In a support letter dated April 19, 2012, the petitioner stated that it "is an ongoing business entity which operates retail establishments, including convenience and gas stations and [b]eauty [s]alons."

The petitioner stated that as an accountant, the beneficiary "will essentially be responsible for overseeing the management of the financial and accounting aspects of the business." The petitioner further indicated that the beneficiary "would play an important role in providing the best possible management of accounts and financial supervision for [the petitioner]." The petitioner provided the following description of the proffered position:

The position being offered to [the beneficiary] would include the following specific duties:

- Accounting, bookkeeping/tax responsibilities, financial reports, payroll;

¹ The petitioner also states that it operates convenience and gas stations and beauty salons, and that it has seven employees.

- Budgeting, performance evaluation, cost management, and asset management financial planning;
- Maintenance and supervision of accounts payables and receivables;
- Financial analysis, planning, budgeting, and cost accounting.

In order to perform the duties of an Accountant, the incumbent must at a minimum have a bachelor's degree.⁴

The petitioner states that the beneficiary received a bachelor's degree from the [REDACTED] in Pakistan and a Master of Business Administration from [REDACTED] in Pakistan. The petitioner stated that the degrees have been evaluated as the equivalent of a U.S. Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. In support of this statement, the petitioner provided copies of the beneficiary's academic credentials and an education evaluation report.

The petitioner also submitted a Labor Condition Application (LCA) in support of the instant petition that designated the proffered position under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors" – SOC (ONET/OES) code 13-2011. The petitioner indicated that the wage level for the proffered position was Level I (entry).

The director found the initial evidence insufficient to establish eligibility for the benefit sought, and issued an RFE on October 4, 2012. The director outlined the evidence to be submitted. Counsel responded to the RFE on December 28, 2012, and provided a brief and additional evidence in support of the H-1B 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 a body of highly specialized knowledge, and attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent). The director denied the petition on February 11, 2013. Counsel for the petitioner submitted an appeal of the denial of the H-1B petition.

The issue before the AAO is whether the petitioner has provided sufficient evidence to establish that it would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. The AAO will first discuss some findings that are material to this decision's application of the H-1B statutory and regulatory framework to the proffered position as described in the record of proceeding.

II. Preliminary Issues

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, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) looks to the Form I-129 and the documents filed in support of the

⁴ The petitioner does not claim that the position 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*, or its equivalent, as the minimum for entry into the occupation, as required by the Act.

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." For H-1B approval, the petitioner must demonstrate a legitimate need for an employee exists and to substantiate that it has H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary for the period of employment requested in the petition.

In the instant case, the AAO notes that the description of the duties of the proffered position fails to adequately convey the substantive work that the beneficiary will perform within the petitioner's business operations. The description of the beneficiary's duties lacks the specificity and detail necessary to support the petitioner's assertion that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. The abstract level of information provided about the proffered position and its constituent duties is exemplified by the petitioner's assertion that the beneficiary is responsible for "[a]ccounting, bookkeeping/tax responsibilities, financial reports, payroll." The petitioner's statement – as so generally described – does not illuminate the substantive application of knowledge involved or any particular educational attainment associated with such application. Further, it fails to provide any particular details regarding the demands, level of responsibilities and requirements necessary for the performance of this duty. The petitioner further claims that the beneficiary is responsible for "maintenance and supervision of accounts payables and receivables." However, this statement does not provide any information as to the complexity of the job duties, the amount of supervision required, and the level of judgment and understanding required to perform the duties. Furthermore, the phrases could cover a range of issues, and without additional information, do not provide any insights into the beneficiary's day-to-day work.

While this type of general description may be appropriate when defining the range of duties that may be performed within an occupational category, it generally cannot be relied upon by a petitioner when discussing the duties attached to specific employment for H-1B approval as it fails to adequately convey the substantive work that the beneficiary will perform within the petitioner's business activities. More specifically, in establishing a position as a specialty occupation, a petitioner must describe the specific duties and responsibilities to be performed by a beneficiary in the context of the petitioner's business operations, demonstrate a legitimate need for an employee exists, and substantiate that it has H-1B caliber work for the beneficiary for the period of employment requested in the petition. Therefore, it is not evident that the proposed duties as described, and the position that they comprise, merit recognition of the proffered position as a specialty occupation.

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

Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that the size of an employer's business has or could have an impact on the duties of a particular position. See *EG Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a/ Mexican Wholesale Grocery v Department of Homeland Security*, 467 F. Supp. 2d 728 (E.D. Mich. 2006). Thus, the size of a petitioner may be considered as a component of the nature of the petitioner's business, as the size impacts upon the duties of a particular position. In matters where a petitioner's operations are relatively small, the AAO reviews the record for evidence that its operations, are, nevertheless, of sufficient complexity to indicate that it would employ the beneficiary in position requiring the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge that may be obtained only through a baccalaureate degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Additionally, when a petitioner employs relatively few people, it may be necessary for the petitioner to establish how the beneficiary will be relieved from performing non-qualifying duties. Here, the petitioner stated on the Form I-129 that it employs seven people and that its business operations consist of convenience and gas stations and beauty salons.⁵ The petitioner has not provided information regarding the duties and responsibilities of the other employees such that the AAO can ascertain how the beneficiary would be relieved from performing non-qualifying duties.

In the instant case, the petitioner has failed to provide sufficient details regarding the nature and scope of the beneficiary's employment or substantive evidence regarding the actual work that the beneficiary would perform. Without a meaningful job description, the record lacks evidence sufficiently concrete and informative to demonstrate that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. The tasks as described fail to communicate (1) the actual work that the beneficiary would perform, (2) the complexity, uniqueness and/or specialization of the tasks, and/or (3) the correlation between that work and a need for a particular level education of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty. The petitioner's assertions with regard to the educational requirements of the position are conclusory and unpersuasive, as they are not supported by the job description or substantive evidence.

III. Specialty Occupation

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

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

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

⁵ The petitioner's 2011 tax return indicates on the Form 1120 (U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return) that the petitioner paid \$30,606 in salaries and wages (line 13) and \$27,600 in compensation for officers (line 12). There were no costs for labor (line 3) of Form 1125-A (Cost of Goods Sold).

- (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.

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

In the letter of support dated April 19, 2012, the petitioner states that "[i]n order to perform the duties of an Accountant, the incumbent must at a minimum have a bachelor's degree." Thus, the petitioner claims that a bachelor's degree is required for the proffered position, but it does not indicate that any specific specialty is required. As mentioned above, the petitioner must demonstrate that the proffered position requires a precise and specific course of study that relates directly to the position in question. See *Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d at 147 (describing "a degree requirement in a specific specialty" as "one that relates directly to the duties and responsibilities of a particular position"). There must be a close correlation between the required specialized studies and the position; thus, the mere requirement of a degree, 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) (stating that "[t]he mere requirement of a college degree for the sake of general education, or to obtain what an employer perceives to be a higher caliber employee, also does not establish eligibility"). Thus, while a general-purpose degree or a degree in any discipline 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. Thus, the petitioner's statement that a bachelor's degree, without further specification, indicates that the proffered position does not qualify as specialty occupation.

Nevertheless, the AAO will now 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.

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.⁸ As previously discussed, the petitioner asserts in the LCA that the proffered position falls under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors."

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.⁹ However, the *Handbook* does not indicate that "Accountants" comprise an occupational group for which at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation.

The subsection entitled "What Accountants and Auditors Do" states the following about the duties of this occupation:

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

⁸ All of the AAO's references are to the 2014-2015 edition of the *Handbook*, which may be accessed at the Internet site <http://www.bls.gov/OCO/>.

⁹ For additional information on the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors," see U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2014-15 ed.*, Accountants and Auditors, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-2> (last visited April 7, 2014).

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*, 2014-15 ed., Accountants and Auditors, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-2> (last visited April 7, 2014).

When reviewing the *Handbook*, the AAO must note that the petitioner designated the proffered position as a Level I (entry level) position on the LCA.¹⁰ This designation is indicative of a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within the occupation. That is, in accordance with the relevant DOL explanatory information on wage levels, this wage rate indicates that the beneficiary is only required to have a basic understanding of the occupation and carries expectations that the beneficiary perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment; that he 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.

¹⁰ The "Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance" issued by DOL provides a description of the wage levels. A Level 1 wage rate is described by DOL as follows:

Level 1 (entry) wage rates are assigned to job offers for beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation. These employees perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. The tasks provide experience and familiarization with the employer's methods, practices, and programs. The employees may perform higher level work for training and developmental purposes. These employees work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required tasks and results expected. Their work is closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy. Statements that the job offer is for a research fellow, a worker in training, or an internship are indicators that a Level I wage should be considered.

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

The *Handbook* reports that certification may be advantageous or even required for some accountant positions. While counsel asserts that the proffered position most closely resembles the *Handbook's* description of management accountant, there is no indication 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, those with associate's degrees, as well as bookkeepers and accounting clerks who meet the education and experience requirements set by their employers, get junior accounting positions and advance to accountant positions by showing their accounting skills on the job.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2014-15 ed., Accountants and Auditors, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-4> (last visited April 7, 2014).

The *Handbook* reports that those with associate's degrees, as well as bookkeepers and accounting clerks who meet the education and experience requirements set by employers get junior accounting positions and advance to accountant positions by showing 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.

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.¹¹ More specifically, "most" is not indicative that a position normally requires at least a

¹¹ For instance, the first definition of "most" in *Webster's New Collegiate College Dictionary* 731 (Third Edition, Hough Mifflin Harcourt 2008) is "[g]reatest in number, quantity, size, or degree." As such, if merely 51% of the positions require at least a bachelor's degree, it could be said that "most" of the positions require such a degree. It cannot be found, therefore, that a particular degree requirement for "most" positions in a given occupation equates to a normal minimum entry requirement for that occupation, much less for the particular position proffered by the petitioner (which is designated as a Level I position in the LCA). Instead, a normal minimum entry requirement is one that denotes a standard entry requirement but recognizes that certain, limited exceptions to that standard may exist. To interpret this provision otherwise would run directly contrary to the plain language of the Act, which requires in part "attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States." Section 214(i)(1) of the Act.

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 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 *Handbook* states, in pertinent part, 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, 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 for accuracy in figures, postings, and reports
- 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).

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.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2014-15 ed., Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/office-and-administrative-support/bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm#tab-2> (last visited April 7, 2014).

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.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2014-15 ed., Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oooh/office-and-administrative-support/bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm#tab-4> (last visited April 7, 2014).

The *Handbook* does not report that "Bookkeeping, Accounting, or Auditing Clerks" comprise an occupational category for which normally the minimum requirement for entry is at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty (or its equivalent) for entry. The *Handbook* explains that most bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks need a high school diploma. The *Handbook* continues by stating that some employers prefer candidates who have some postsecondary education, particularly coursework in accounting. The *Handbook* further 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.

It is incumbent on the petitioner to provide sufficient evidence to establish that the particular position that it proffers would necessitate services at a level requiring the theoretical and practical application of at least a bachelor's degree level of a body of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty. As previously mentioned, 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. 158, 165 (Comm'r 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure*

Craft of California, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm'r 1972)). The fact that a person may be employed in a position designated by a petitioner as that of an accountant and may apply some 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.

In response to the RFE, counsel references the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Online Summary Report for the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors." Upon review, the AAO notes that contrary to counsel's assertion, O*NET does not establish that the proffered position satisfies the requirements for a specialty occupation position. Under the subsection entitled "Education," O*NET states that "[m]ost of these occupations require a four-year bachelor's degree, but some do not." As previously discussed, "most" is not indicative that a position normally requires at least a bachelor's degree, or its equivalent, in a specific specialty. Furthermore, O*NET does not state that a degree must be in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

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

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

In determining whether there is such a common degree requirement, factors often considered by USCIS include: whether the *Handbook* reports a standard, 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 at 1165 (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. at 1102).

As previously 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 of at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. Thus, the AAO incorporates by reference the previous discussion on the matter. Also, there are no submissions from professional associations 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.

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

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 the proffered 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.

Upon review of the record, the petitioner has not credibly demonstrated exactly what the beneficiary will do on a day-to-day basis such that complexity or uniqueness can even be determined.¹² The petitioner submitted a general job description for the proffered position. The description does not specifically identify any tasks that are so complex or unique that only a specifically degreed individual could perform them. The petitioner did not submit information relevant to a detailed course of study leading to a specialty degree and did not establish how such a curriculum is necessary to perform the duties of the position. While a few related courses may be beneficial, or in some cases even required, to perform certain duties of the position, the petitioner has failed to demonstrate how an established curriculum of such courses leading to a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is required to perform the duties of the proffered position.

Moreover, the petitioner failed to provide documentary evidence to establish that the duties performed by the beneficiary involve any particular level of complexity or uniqueness. For instance, in response to the RFE, counsel indicated that the petitioner owns several entities and that the beneficiary "will be performing accounting duties for all three of these entities, as they are all owned by [the petitioner]." The petitioner submitted documentation regarding the companies' business operations, including corporate tax returns, lease agreements, business licenses, bank statements, invoices, receipts, and related corporate materials.¹³

While the petitioner submitted a large volume of documents, it must be noted that the petitioner failed to establish how the evidence relates to the beneficiary's day-to-day responsibilities and how the nature of processing such documents demonstrates that its particular position is so complex or unique that it can only be performed only by an individual with a baccalaureate (or higher degree) in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. It is not the volume of documentation that establishes eligibility for the benefit sought, but rather the relevance, probative value, and credibility of the documentation – both individually and within the context of the totality of the evidence. The petitioner has not developed or established complexity or uniqueness as attributes of the proffered

¹² In the appeal, counsel claims that some of the duties of the proffered position are duties that apply to bookkeepers, but that the duties primarily fall under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors." As previously discussed, the petitioner's description of the duties of the proffered position fails to adequately convey the substantive work that the beneficiary will perform within the petitioner's business operations, and the petitioner did not indicate which of the tasks are essential and/or primary duties.

¹³ It is noted that a beneficiary in H-1B classification is only authorized to work for the petitioner.

position that would require the services of a person with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

This is further evidenced by the LCA submitted by the petitioner in support of the instant petition. Again, the LCA indicates a wage level based upon the occupational classification "Accountants and Auditors" at a Level I (entry level) wage. The petitioner designated the position as a Level I position (the lowest of four assignable wage levels), which DOL indicates is appropriate for "beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation." Without further evidence, it is not credible that the duties of the petitioner's proffered position are complex or unique as such a position would likely be classified at a higher-level, such as a Level III (experienced) or Level IV (fully competent) position, requiring a significantly higher prevailing wage. For instance, a Level IV position is designated by DOL for employees who "use advanced skills and diversified knowledge to solve unusual and complex problems."¹⁴

The evidence of record does not establish that this position is significantly different from other positions such that it refutes the *Handbook's* information to the effect that there is a spectrum of acceptable paths (e.g., community college and/or experience) for such positions. In other words, the record lacks sufficiently detailed information to distinguish the proffered position as unique from or more complex than positions that can be performed by persons without at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

The petitioner indicated that the beneficiary is well qualified for the position, and references his academic and professional qualifications. However, the test to establish a position as a specialty occupation is not the education or experience of a proposed beneficiary, but whether the position itself requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Upon review of the record of proceeding, the AAO finds that the petitioner has failed to establish the proffered position as satisfying the second prong of the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

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

To satisfy this criterion, the record must establish that a petitioner's imposition of a degree requirement is not merely a matter of preference for high-caliber candidates but is necessitated by performance requirements of the position. In the instant case, the record does not establish a prior history of recruiting and hiring for the proffered position only persons with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

The petitioner stated in the Form I-129 petition that it has seven employees and that it was established in 2000 (approximately 12 years prior to the H-1B submission). In response to the RFE, counsel indicated that "no accountant has previously been employed."

¹⁴ For additional information on wage levels, see U.S. Dep't of Labor, Emp't & Training Admin., *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*, Nonagric. Immigration Programs (rev. Nov. 2009), available at http://www.foreignlaborcert.doleta.gov/pdf/NPWHC_Guidance_Revised_11_2009.pdf.

(b)(6)

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

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

In the instant case, the petitioner submitted a description of the proffered position, along with documentation regarding its business operations. Upon review of the record of the proceeding, the AAO notes that the petitioner has not provided sufficient probative evidence to satisfy this criterion of the regulations. In the instant case, relative specialization and complexity have not been sufficiently developed by the petitioner as an aspect of the proffered position. That is, the proposed duties have not been described with sufficient specificity to establish that they are more specialized and complex than positions that are not usually associated with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent.

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

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

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

IV. Beneficiary's Qualifications

The AAO does not need to examine the issue of the beneficiary's qualifications, because the petitioner has not provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the proffered position is a specialty occupation. In other words, the beneficiary's credentials to perform a particular job are relevant only when the job is found to be a specialty occupation.

V. Conclusion

An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by the AAO even if the service center does not identify all of the grounds for denial in the initial decision. *See Spencer Enterprises, Inc. v. United States*, 229 F. Supp. 2d 1025, 1043 (E.D. Cal. 2001), *aff'd*, 345 F.3d 683 (9th Cir. 2003); *see also Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 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 must be denied for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternate basis for the decision. In visa petition proceedings, it is the petitioner's burden to establish eligibility for the immigration benefit sought. Section 291 of the Act; *see e.g., 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.