



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

(b)(6)

DATE: JUL 25 2014

OFFICE: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

FILE: [REDACTED]

IN RE:

Petitioner: [REDACTED]

Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

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

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

INSTRUCTIONS:

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 April 1, 2013. In the Form I-129 and supporting documents, the petitioner describes itself as a chemical supply chain established in 2010. In order to employ the beneficiary in what it designates as an accountant position, the petitioner seeks to classify her as a nonimmigrant worker in a specialty occupation pursuant to section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b).

The director denied the petition on September 26, 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 for the petitioner 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 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. We reviewed the record in its entirety before issuing our decision.¹

For the reasons that will be discussed below, we agree with the director'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 at a rate of pay of \$45,000 per year. In the letter of support dated April, 1, 2013, the petitioner provided the following job description for the proffered position, along with the percentage of time the beneficiary will spend on each duty.

- Verify, track and file documents related to accounts payables such as contracts, agreements, bills (from the vendors overseas or domestics) using QuickBooks System. Prepare accounts payable related checks, credit card and wire transfers, ensure timely payment. Evaluate and maintain the monthly expenses report and corresponding expenses receipts and documents from China and the U.S. office (including translations if necessary), enter the data into the system[.] (20%)
- Evaluate and analyze the costs of the accomplished project, calculate costs of goods, overhead and other expenses based on estimates, bills, P.O.s,

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

- quotations and price lists on the monthly basis, report directly to the president of the company[.] (10%)
- Accounts receivable functions, calculate, prepare and file documents related to accounts receivables such as invoices, P.Os from the customers, release orders and other documents using Quickbook system. Maintain "accounts receivables tracking summary[.]" update the daily accounts receivable status, and make collection calls if necessary. (20%)
 - Prepare various General Ledger account reconciliation on a monthly basis, prepare quarterly review schedules for outside auditors as well as various annual and interim audit schedules for outside auditors, assist in the company's operating plan/budget, summarize conclusions and give recommendations, responsible for all cash management and forecasting, assist accounting management in development of client budgets and forecasts, and assist in corporate reporting and filing. (10%)
 - Analyze journal and ledger entries, bank statements, inventories, expenditures, tax returns and other accounting and financial record, documents and system to ensure financial recording accuracy and compliance with established General Accept Accounting Standards, procedures and internal practices. Convert GAAP to IFRS system when reporting to Shanghai. (10%)
 - Check customer[']s credits and coordinate with the manager and the president to open credit account and set account limit. Maintain the customer credit lists, monitor the credit limit status for each customer, advi[s]e on stopping transaction with those customers whose account has met credit limit or has become overdue. (10%)
 - Help to collect and file the state sales and resale certificates from customers [to] assure the collection of sales and use tax, prepare the monthly sales and use tax remittance and report. (5%)
 - Verify expenditure reimbursements. (10%)
 - Other duties as assigned by the manager or the president of the company. (5%)

In addition, the petitioner indicated that "the applicant must have at least a bachelor degree in accounting or another closely related field." The petitioner stated that the beneficiary received a bachelor's degree in Accounting from the [REDACTED] in 2012 and provided copies of the diploma and academic transcript.

Further, the petitioner 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 June 11, 2013. The director outlined the evidence to be submitted. Counsel and the petitioner responded to the RFE by providing additional evidence in support of the H-1B

petition.²

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 September 26, 2013. Counsel for the petitioner submitted an appeal of the denial of the H-1B petition.

II. ISSUE

The issue before us is whether the petitioner has provided sufficient evidence to establish that it would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. Based upon a complete review of the record of proceeding, and for the specific reasons described below, we agree with the director and finds that the evidence fails to establish that the position as described constitutes a specialty occupation.

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
- (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:

² It must be noted for the record that the document entitled "Staff Accountant Job Duties," submitted in response to the director's RFE, is not probative evidence. The document is not on the petitioner's letterhead and it is not endorsed by the petitioner. The record of proceeding does not indicate the source of the expanded duties, the percentage of time allocated to each duty, the level of responsibility for each duty, the average hours per week allocated to each duty, and the minimum requirements to perform each duty that are attributed to the "Staff Accountant" position.

Moreover, we observe that the document mistakenly and repeatedly references a "Ms. [REDACTED]" The record provides no explanation for this inconsistency.

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), the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration (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.

We 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.

We recognize 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.³ As previously discussed, the petitioner asserts in the LCA that the proffered position falls under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors." When reviewing the *Handbook*, we must note that the petitioner designated the proffered position as a Level I (entry level) position on the LCA. This designation is indicative of a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within the occupation.⁴ That is, in accordance with the relevant DOL

³ All of our references are to the 2014-2015 edition of the *Handbook*, which may be accessed at the Internet site <http://www.bls.gov/OCO/>. We hereby incorporate into the record of proceeding the chapters of the *Handbook* regarding "Accountants and Auditors" and "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks."

⁴ 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

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 she would be closely supervised; that her work would be closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that she would receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results. DOL guidance indicates that a Level I designation should be considered for positions in which the employee will serve as a research fellow, worker in training, or an intern.

In the decision dated September 26, 2013, the director found that the duties described for the proffered position appear to be those of the occupational category "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerk." On appeal, counsel for the petitioner asserts that "majority of the duties of the petitioned position belong to that of an accountant, not an accounting clerk."

We reviewed both chapters of the *Handbook* on "Accountants and Auditors" and "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks" including the sections regarding the typical duties and requirements for this occupational category.⁵ However, 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 categories.

The subsection of the *Handbook* entitled "How to Become an Accountant or Auditor" states the following:

Most accountants and auditors need at least a bachelor's degree in accounting or a related field. Certification within a specific field of accounting improves job prospects. For example, many accountants become Certified Public Accountants (CPAs).

Education

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.

⁵ For additional information regarding 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> (last visited July 24, 2014).

Further, for additional information regarding the occupational category "Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks," see 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> (last visited July 24, 2014).

Most accountant and auditor positions require at least a bachelor's degree in accounting or a related field. Some employers prefer to hire applicants who have a master's degree, either in accounting or in business administration with a concentration in accounting.

A few universities and colleges offer specialized programs, such as a bachelor's degree in internal auditing. 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.

Many colleges help students gain practical experience through summer or part-time internships with public accounting or business firms.

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 July 24, 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.⁶ More specifically, "most" is not indicative that a position normally requires at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, (the criterion at 8 C.F.R.

⁶ 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.

§ 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.

Further, as mentioned, the *Handbook* also does not indicate that the occupational category "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* 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/ooh/office-and-administrative-support/bookkeeping-accounting-and-auditing-clerks.htm#tab-4> (last visited July 24, 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.

In response to the RFE, counsel indicates that the occupational category "Accountants" is assigned Occupational Information Network (O*NET) Job Zone 4 referenced in the Office of Foreign Labor Certification (OFLC) Online Data Center's Online Wage Library (OWL). However, we find that this information is insufficient to establish that the position qualifies as a specialty occupation normally requiring at least a bachelor's degree in accounting, or its equivalent. A designation of Job Zone 4, Education and Training Code 5, indicates that a position requires considerable preparation. It does not, however, demonstrate that a bachelor's degree in any specific specialty is required, and does not, therefore, demonstrate that a position so designated is in a specialty occupation as defined in section 214(i)(1) of the Act and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). More specifically, the OWL statement is a condensed version of what the O*NET actually states about its Job Zone 4 designation. See O*NET OnLine Help Center, at <http://www.onetonline.org/help/online/zones>, for a discussion of Job Zone 4, which explains that this Zone signifies only that most but not all of the occupations within it require a bachelor's degree. Further, the Help Center's discussion confirms that Job Zone 4 does not indicate any requirements for particular majors or academic concentrations. Therefore, the OWL and O*NET information is not probative of the proffered position qualifying as a specialty occupation.

It is incumbent on the petitioner to provide sufficient evidence to establish that the particular position that it proffers would necessitate services at a level requiring the theoretical and practical application of at least a bachelor's degree level of a body of highly specialized knowledge in a specific specialty. 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.

Based upon a complete review of the record of proceeding, we find 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 objective, authoritative source) indicates that at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the occupation. 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)(I).

Next, we 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 1151, 1165 (D.Minn. 1999) (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. 1095, 1102 (S.D.N.Y. 1989)).

As previously discussed, the petitioner has not established that its proffered position is one for which the *Handbook* (or other objective, authoritative source), reports a standard, industry-wide requirement of at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent. Thus, we incorporate by reference 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.

In support of the petitioner's assertion that the proffered position is a specialty occupation position, the record of proceeding contains multiple job announcements. However, upon review of the evidence, we find that the petitioner's reliance on the job announcements is misplaced.

In the Form I-129 and supporting documentation, the petitioner indicates it is a chemical supply chain established in 2010, with 8 employees. In its support letter dated April 1, 2013, the petitioner indicated that it is "a wholly owned subsidiary of [REDACTED]." The petitioner did not provide its gross or net annual income, but stated that "it was incorporated in [REDACTED] in July [REDACTED] with a registered capital of \$500,000." The petitioner designated its business operations under the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 483111 – "Deep Sea Freight Transportation."⁷ The U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau website describes this NAICS code as follows:

This U.S. industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in providing deep sea transportation of cargo to or from foreign ports.

See U.S. Dep't of Commerce, U.S Census Bureau, 2012 NAICS Definition, 483111 – Deep Sea Freight Transportation on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/sssd/naics/naicsrch> (last visited July 24, 2014).

⁷ NAICS is used to classify business establishments according to type of economic activity, and each establishment is classified to an industry according to the primary business activity taking place there. *See* U.S. Dep't of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, NAICS, on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics/> (last visited July 24, 2014).

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

Upon review of the documentation, the petitioner fails 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.

For example, the petitioner submitted advertisements for organizations that do not appear to be similar to the petitioner. Such samples of advertisements include [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Specifically, [REDACTED] describes itself as "a distributor of [REDACTED] equipment and supply." Similarly, [REDACTED] industry is described as "mechanical maker," and [REDACTED] provide services in "solid waste collection, transfer, disposal and recycling to more than 2 million commercial, industrial, and residential customers in 30 states." Further, [REDACTED] is described as a "national mortgage lending firm" and [REDACTED] appears to be in "accounting and auditing services" industry. Moreover, [REDACTED] is "a global contractor specializing in energy infrastructure serving the oil, gas and power industries." Likewise, [REDACTED] is in accounting/finance industry, and [REDACTED] appears to be in the manufacturing industry. Without further information, the advertisements appear to be for organizations that are not similar to the petitioner, and the petitioner failed to supplement the record of proceeding to establish that the employers are similar to it. That is, the petitioner has not provided information regarding which aspects or traits (if any) it shares with the advertising organizations. In addition, the advertisement from [REDACTED] does not include sufficient information about its organization to conduct a legitimate comparison to the petitioner's business.

Moreover, some of the advertisements do not appear to be for parallel positions. For instance, [REDACTED] requires "2 to 5 years as Accountant or Staff accountant" for their advertised position. Likewise, [REDACTED] requires a "minimum of 2-4 years of relevant work experience." As previously discussed, the petitioner designated the proffered position on the LCA through the wage level as a Level I low, entry-level position. Furthermore, some of the positions do not appear to have similar duties to the proffered position. For these postings, the petitioner has not sufficiently established that the primary duties and responsibilities of the advertised positions are parallel to the proffered position.

As the documentation does not establish that the petitioner has met this prong of the regulations, further analysis regarding the specific information contained in each of the job postings is not

necessary. That is, as the evidence does not establish that similar organizations in the same industry routinely require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, for parallel positions, not every deficit of every job posting has been addressed.

The job advertisements do not establish that similar organizations to the petitioner routinely employ individuals with degrees in a specific specialty, in parallel positions in the petitioner's industry. Further, it must be noted that even if all of the job postings indicated that a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations (which they do not), the petitioner fails to demonstrate what statistically valid inferences, if any, can be drawn from the advertisements with regard to determining the common educational requirements for entry into parallel positions in similar organizations.⁸

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

We 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.

On appeal, counsel for the petitioner emphasizes that the petitioner is "a wholly owned subsidiary of [redacted] (the parent company)." Counsel indicated that "the parent company is very established in the field of supply chain management" and that it has about "568 employees worldwide, total asset of [redacted] and annual sales revenue of [redacted] in year

⁸ According to the *Handbook's* detailed statistics on accounts and auditors, there were approximately 1,275,400 persons employed as accountants and auditors in 2012. *Handbook*, 2014-15 ed., available at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/business-and-financial/accountants-and-auditors.htm#tab-6> (last accessed July 24, 2014). Based on the size of this relevant study population, the petitioner fails to demonstrate what statistically valid inferences, if any, can be drawn from the job postings with regard to the common educational requirements for entry into parallel positions in similar organizations. 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 organizations similar to the petitioner in its industry, for positions parallel to the proffered position, commonly require at least a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, it cannot be found that just these postings (which appear to have been consciously selected) could credibly refute the statistics-based findings of the *Handbook* published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that such a position does not normally require at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, for entry into the occupation in the United States.

2012." In support, the petitioner submitted various documents, including information regarding the proffered position and evidence regarding its business operations. For example, the submission included the following:

- Quarterly Tax Return Form from April 2011 to December 2012
- Balance Sheet 2011 and 2012
- Organization chart for the parent company

While the petitioner submitted financial documents that relate to the parent company, the petitioner did not explain 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. Upon review, we find that the petitioner has not developed or established complexity or uniqueness as attributes of the proffered 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. 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 she would be closely supervised; that her work would be closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that she would receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results. 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."⁹

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.

⁹ 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.

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

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

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

beneficiary is to be specifically employed - then any alien with a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty could be brought into the United States to perform non-specialty occupations, so long as the employer required all such employees to have baccalaureate or higher degrees. *See id.* at 388.

The petitioner stated in the Form I-129 petition that it has eight employees and that it was established in 2010. In response to the RFE, counsel submitted the petitioner's job posting for a finance manager posted on October 9, 2012. Upon review, the finance manager position does not appear to be similar to the proffered position. The finance manager position is described as "the senior finance person" and is responsible for "provid[ing] leadership and direction to the site management team." Moreover, the position requires "solid experience (7+ years) in local financial or management accounting." As previously noted, the petitioner designated the proffered position at a Level I on the LCA. This designation is indicative of a comparatively low, entry-level position relative to others within the occupation and signifies that the beneficiary is only expected to possess a basic understanding of the occupation and will perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. Since the posting for finance manager position appears to be for a more senior position, it is not probative evidence that a degree is normally required for the proffered position. Counsel also submitted a posting for an accountant position which outlines the duties that appear verbatim from the job description provided for the proffered position. However, this announcement was posted on June 28, 2013, which is after the issuance of RFE on June 11, 2013; therefore, it is not probative evidence to establish that the employer normally requires a bachelor's degree for the proffered position.¹⁰

Further, counsel also submitted copies of academic credentials and W-2 forms for the employees in allegedly similar positions. Specifically, counsel submitted a copy of a diploma for the finance manager, Mr. [REDACTED] who has a Bachelor of Science in Economics. As discussed above, the finance manager position appears to be a more senior position, and evidence of the finance manager's diploma in Economics is not probative evidence. Similarly, counsel also claimed that one of their former employees, [REDACTED] who was the assistant finance manager, has a Master of Professional Accountancy from [REDACTED]. However, counsel did not submit evidence to substantiate her claim and claimed that the diploma is no longer available. It is noted that 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). Further, while counsel also submitted a job description of the assistant finance manager on appeal, it is noted that the requirement for the position is a bachelor's degree in business administration or financial management. We hereby reiterate that the degree requirement set by the statutory and regulatory framework of the H-1B program is not just a bachelor's or higher degree in any field, but such a degree in a *specific specialty* that is directly related to the specialty occupation claimed in the petition.

¹⁰ We note that evidence that the petitioner creates after an RFE is issued will not be considered independent and objective evidence. Necessarily, independent and objective evidence would be evidence that is contemporaneous with the event to be proven and existent at the time of the director's notice.

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, we find 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, we reiterate our earlier comments and findings with regard to the implication of the petitioner's designation of the proffered position in the LCA as a Level I (the lowest of four assignable levels). That is, the 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 Auditors," 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, we find 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. We, therefore, conclude 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. BEYOND THE DECISION OF THE DIRECTOR

Upon review of the records, it appears that the petitioner did not establish that it will pay the

beneficiary an adequate salary for her work. As mentioned, the LCA designation for the proffered position corresponds to the occupational classification of "Accountants and Auditors" – SOC (ONET/OES Code) 15-1121, at a Level I (entry level) wage.

Wage levels should be determined only after selecting the most relevant O*NET code classification. Then, a prevailing wage determination is made by selecting one of four wage levels for an occupation based on a comparison of the employer's job requirements to the occupational requirements, including tasks, knowledge, skills, and specific vocational preparation (education, training and experience) generally required for acceptable performance in that occupation.¹¹

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.¹² 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 as indicated by the job description.

In the instant case, it appears that the beneficiary's duties require the knowledge of Chinese. For example, the petitioner claims that the beneficiary will "evaluate and maintain the monthly expenses report and corresponding expenses receipts and documents from China and the U.S. office (including translations if necessary)."

In accordance with the guidance provided by DOL, a language requirement other than English in a petitioner's job offer generally is considered a special skill for all occupations, with the exception of "Foreign Language Teachers and Instructors," "Interpreters," and "Caption Writers." *Id.* In the instant case, the petitioner designated the proffered position under the occupational category "Accountants and Auditors" at a Level I (the lowest of four assignable wage levels), and it has not established that the foreign language requirement was reflected in the wage-level for the proffered position. Therefore, the petitioner has failed to establish that it would pay the beneficiary an adequate salary for her work, as required under the Act, if the petition were granted.

¹¹ 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.

¹² A point system is used to assess the complexity of the job and assign the wage level. Step 1 requires a "1" to represent the job's requirements. Step 2 addresses experience and must contain a "0" (for at or below the level of experience and SVP range), a "1" (low end of experience and SVP), a "2" (high end), or "3" (greater than range). Step 3 considers education required to perform the job duties, a "1" (more than the usual education by one category) or "2" (more than the usual education by more than one category). Step 4 accounts for special skills requirements that indicate a higher level of complexity or decision-making with a "1" or a "2" entered as appropriate. Finally, Step 5 addresses supervisory duties, with a "1" entered unless supervision is generally required by the occupation.

V. CONCLUSION AND ORDER

An application or petition that fails to comply with the technical requirements of the law may be denied by us 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 we deny a petition on multiple alternative grounds, a plaintiff can succeed on a challenge only if it shows that we abused our discretion with respect to all of our 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 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.