



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

(b)(6)

DATE: **MAR 27 2014** OFFICE: CALIFORNIA SERVICE CENTER [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 (hereinafter "director") denied the nonimmigrant visa petition, and the matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed. The petition will be denied.

I. PROCEDURAL AND FACTUAL BACKGROUND

On the Form I-129 visa petition, the petitioner describes itself as a software development firm. In order to employ the beneficiary in what it designates as a systems analyst 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, finding that the petitioner failed to establish that it would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation position. On appeal, the petitioner's vice president asserted that the director's basis for denial was erroneous and contended that the petitioner satisfied all evidentiary requirements.

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

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

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

In the exercise of its administrative review in this matter, as in all matters that come within its purview, the AAO follows the preponderance of the evidence standard as specified in the controlling precedent decision, *Matter of Chawathe*, 25 I&N Dec. 369 (AAO 2010), unless the law specifically provides that a different standard applies. In pertinent part, that decision states the following:

Except where a different standard is specified by law, a petitioner or applicant in administrative immigration proceedings must prove by a preponderance of evidence that he or she is eligible for the benefit sought.

* * *

The "preponderance of the evidence" of "truth" is made based on the factual circumstances of each individual case.

* * *

Thus, in adjudicating the application pursuant to the preponderance of the evidence standard, the director must examine each piece of evidence for relevance, probative value, and credibility, both individually and within the context of the totality of the evidence, to determine whether the fact to be proven is probably true.

Even if the director has some doubt as to the truth, if the petitioner submits relevant, probative, and credible evidence that leads the director to believe that the claim is "more likely than not" or "probably" true, the applicant or petitioner has satisfied the standard of proof. *See INS v. Cardoza-Foncesca*, 480 U.S. 421, 431 (1987) (discussing "more likely than not" as a greater than 50% chance of an occurrence taking place). If the director can articulate a material doubt, it is appropriate for the director to either request additional evidence or, if that doubt leads the director to believe that the claim is probably not true, deny the application or petition.

Id. at 375-76.

The AAO conducts its review of service center decisions on a *de novo* basis. *See Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). In doing so, the AAO applies the preponderance of the evidence standard as outlined in *Matter of Chawathe*. Upon its review of the present matter pursuant to that standard, however, the AAO finds that the evidence in the record of proceeding does not support counsel's contentions that the evidence of record requires that the petition at issue be approved. Applying the preponderance of the evidence standard as stated in *Matter of Chawathe*, the AAO finds that the director's determination that the evidence of record does not establish that the proffered position is a specialty occupation was correct. Upon its review of the entire record of proceeding, and with close attention and due regard to all of the evidence, separately and in the aggregate, submitted in support of this petition, the AAO finds that the evidence of record does not establish that the claim of a proffer of a specialty occupation position is "more likely than not" or "probably" true. In other words, as the evidentiary analysis of this decision will reflect, the petitioner has not submitted relevant, probative, and credible evidence that leads the AAO to believe that the petitioner's claim that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation is "more likely than not" or "probably" true.

III. THE LAW

The issue before the AAO is whether the petitioner has demonstrated that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation. Section 214(i)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(i)(1), defines the term "specialty occupation" as an occupation that requires:

- (A) theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge, and
- (B) attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree in the specific specialty (or its equivalent) as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) states, in pertinent part, the following:

Specialty occupation means an occupation which [(1)] requires theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge in fields of human endeavor including, but not limited to, architecture, engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, social sciences, medicine and health, education, business specialties, accounting, law, theology, and the arts, and which [(2)] requires the attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, as a minimum for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), to qualify as a specialty occupation, 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 result, 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) must therefore be read as providing supplemental criteria that must be met in accordance with, and not as alternatives to, the statutory and regulatory definitions of specialty occupation.

As such and consonant with section 214(i)(1) of the Act and the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) consistently interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proffered position. See *Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d 139, 147 (1st Cir. 2007) (describing "a degree requirement in a specific specialty" as "one that relates directly to the duties and responsibilities of a particular position"). Applying this standard, USCIS regularly approves H-1B petitions for qualified aliens who are to be employed as engineers, computer scientists, certified public accountants, college professors, and other such occupations. These professions, for which petitioners have regularly been able to establish a minimum entry requirement in the United States of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the particular position, fairly represent the types of specialty occupations that Congress contemplated when it created the H-1B visa category.

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

The AAO notes that, as recognized by the court in *Defensor, supra*, where the work is to be performed for entities other than the petitioner, evidence of the client companies' job requirements is critical. See *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d at 387-388. The court held that the former Immigration and Naturalization Service had reasonably interpreted the statute and regulations as requiring the petitioner to produce evidence that a proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation on the basis of the requirements imposed by the entities using the beneficiary's services. *Id.* at 384. Such evidence must be sufficiently detailed to demonstrate the type and educational level of highly specialized knowledge in a specific discipline that is necessary to perform that particular work.

IV. EVIDENCE

The Labor Condition Application (LCA) submitted to support the visa petition states that the proffered position is a systems analyst position, and that it corresponds to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code and title 15-1121, Computer Systems Analysts from the Occupational Information Network (O*NET). The LCA further states that the proffered position is a Level I, entry-level, position. The visa petition states that the period of requested employment is from October 1, 2013 to September 3, 2016.

With the visa petition, counsel submitted evidence that shows the beneficiary received a bachelor of technology degree in computer science and engineering from [REDACTED]

The record contains no evaluation of that degree's equivalence to any U.S. degree. The record also contains evidence that the beneficiary received a master's degree in computer science from

Counsel also submitted, *inter alia*, the following: (1) a letter, dated March 18, 2013, from the petitioner's vice president; (2) a Subcontractor/Master Agreement executed July 10, 2012, by the petitioner and an officer of and (3) a document headed, "Itinerary of Services for [the beneficiary]."

The March 18, 2013 letter from the petitioner's vice president states the following pertinent to the duties of the proffered position:

Specifically, as a Systems Analyst, the beneficiary will analyze computer problems of existing and proposed systems and initiate and enable specific technologies that will maximize our company's ability to deliver more efficient and effective technological and computer-related solutions to our business clients. The beneficiary will gather information from users to define the exact nature of system problems and then design a system of computer programs and procedures to resolve these problems. As a Systems Analyst, the beneficiary will plan and develop new computer systems and devise ways to apply the IT industry's already-existing technological resources to additional operations that will streamline our clients' business processes. This process of developing new computer systems will include the design or addition of hardware or software applications that will better harness the power and usefulness of our clients' computer systems. In this position, the beneficiary will employ a combination of techniques, including: structured analysis, data modeling, information engineering, mathematical model building, sampling, and cost accounting to plan systems and procedures to resolve computer problems. As part of the duties of a Systems Analyst, the beneficiary will also analyze subject matter operations to be automated, specify the number and type of records, files and documents to be used, and format the output to meet user's needs. As a Systems Analyst, the beneficiary is also required to develop complete specifications and structure charts that will enable computer users to prepare required programs. Most importantly, once the systems have been instituted, the beneficiary will coordinate tests of the systems, participate in trial runs of new and revised systems, and recommend computer equipment changes to obtain more effective operations.

The petitioner's vice president also stated, "As with any Systems Analyst position, the usual minimum requirement for performance of the job duties is a bachelor's degree, or equivalent, in computers, engineering, or a related field."

The Subcontractor/Master Agreement specifies the terms pursuant to which Corporation might, in the future, utilize one of more of the petitioner's workers on unidentified projects in unidentified locations.

The itinerary provided states that the beneficiary would be provided, through [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to provide services for [REDACTED] as a systems analyst for \$60,000 annually from October 1, 2013 to September 3, 2016. It is signed by the petitioner's vice president, but contains no indication, other than the petitioner's vice president's signature, that Neumeric Corporation, Infosys, or Nationwide have consented to that assignment for that period.

On April 25, 2013, the service center issued an RFE in this matter. The service center requested, *inter alia*, evidence that the petitioner would employ the beneficiary in a specialty occupation. The service center specifically stated:

You have not provided sufficient evidence from the middle vendors [REDACTED] to establish the duties the beneficiary will be performing, the qualifications necessary to perform such work, the location the beneficiary will be located, the duration the beneficiary's services will be required by the end client, who will maintain the right to control and supervise the beneficiary, and how this right to control and supervise will be exercised at the end client worksite.

Therefore, the evidence is insufficient to establish 1) that there is sufficient specialty occupation work immediately available for the beneficiary for the entire duration of the requested validity period and 2) that a valid employer-employee relationship will exist between you and the beneficiary for the duration of the requested validity period.

The director then outlined the specific evidence to be submitted.

In response, counsel submitted, *inter alia*, the following: (1) an Employment Agreement executed by the petitioner and the beneficiary on March 18, 2013; (2) a letter, dated March 22, 2013, from [REDACTED] (3) a letter, dated March 24, 2013, from the Vice President, Product Development, at [REDACTED] and (4) a July 2, 2013 letter from the petitioner's vice president.

The March 18, 2013 employment agreement states, in pertinent part, the following:

Duties rendered away from the [petitioner's] premises will not alter the nature of the employment relationship and [the beneficiary] will remain under the supervision of [the petitioner] and subject to the [petitioner's] policies and procedures. Upon the completion of duties away from [the petitioner's] premises, [the beneficiary] shall report immediately back to [the petitioner's] office for his subsequent assignment.

It further states:

If [the beneficiary] is directed to render services away from [the petitioner's] business premises, [the beneficiary] shall report back to [the petitioner] 4 time(s) per month for an evaluation of progress, performance, and goals.

The March 22, 2013 letter from [redacted] states, in its entirety the following:

The purpose of this letter is to confirm the assignment of [**the beneficiary**], who is working at our office [redacted] in the position of Systems Analyst.

[The beneficiary] is currently assigned to [redacted] She is working on this project since 08.22.2012 with expected extensions if necessary.

[The beneficiary] is contracted through our vendor [redacted] and is an employee of [redacted] retains the right to hire, fire, and supervise her and is responsible for any payments and employee benefits she receives. Our company does not have the ability to assign her to any other company or to independently alter the terms of her assignment.

This work will be conducted at our office located at [redacted]

The March 24, 2013 letter from the Vice President, Product Development, at [redacted] states, in its entirety the following:

The purpose of this letter is to confirm the assignment of [**the beneficiary**], who is working at [redacted] in the position of [redacted]

[The beneficiary] is currently assigned to [redacted] project at [redacted] [The beneficiary] has been assigned to this project with our contracts with [redacted] and [redacted] This project is expected to go until till [sic] end of next year.

[The beneficiary's] primary duties include:

- Analyze user specifications and requirements and [d]esign them for functional activities.
- Develop java program complying with coding standards defined by technical management.
- Test, debug and refine application to produce required product.

- Prepare required documents including program-level and user-level documentation

[The beneficiary] is contracted through [redacted] and is an employee of [the petitioner]. [The petitioner] retains supervisory control of [the beneficiary] including the right to hire and fire her and to receive periodic reports from her and retains the right to control [the beneficiary's] daily activities and the manner and means of her work, if required. [The beneficiary] is paid by [the petitioner] only and any tax implications, any employee benefits [the beneficiary] receives are from [the petitioner]. As [the beneficiary] is an employee of [the petitioner], our company does not have the ability to assign her to any other company or to independently alter the terms of her assignment.

This work will be conducted at Client office located at [redacted] [The beneficiary] will be supervised by [redacted] and who can be contacted at [redacted]. Our Company does not have the ability to assign [the beneficiary] to another location.

The petitioner's vice president's July 2, 2013 letter asserts that the evidence submitted adequately demonstrates that the beneficiary would perform specialty occupation duties at Nationwide's location throughout the requested period of employment.

The director denied the petition on July 10, 2013, finding, as was noted above, that the petitioner had not demonstrated that the proffered position qualifies as a position in a specialty occupation by virtue of requiring a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

On appeal, counsel submitted, *inter alia*, the following: (1) a letter, dated July 31, 2013 from [redacted] the application development manager at [redacted] (2) four vacancy announcements; and (3) an appellate brief signed by the petitioner's vice president.

The body of [redacted] July 31, 2013 letter states, in its entirety, the following:

The purpose of this letter is to confirm the assignment of [**the beneficiary**], who is working at our office [redacted] in the position of System Analyst.

[The beneficiary] is currently assigned to [redacted] working within the Agent [redacted] team. [The beneficiary] has been assigned to this project with our contracts with [redacted]. This project is expected to last to at least January 2015 with expected extensions if necessary.

[The beneficiary's] primary duties include:

- Analyze user specifications and requirements and [d]esign them for functional activities.
- Develop java program complying with coding standards defined by technical management.
- Test, debug and refine application to produce required product.
- Prepare required documents including program-level and user-level documentation
- Support the release.

[The beneficiary] is contracted through our vendor [REDACTED] and is an employee of [the petitioner]. [The petitioner] retains supervisory control of [the beneficiary] including the right to hire and fire her and to receive periodic reports from her and retains the right to control [the beneficiary's] daily activities and the manner and means of her work, if required. [The beneficiary] is paid by [the petitioner] only and any tax implications, any employee benefits [the beneficiary] receives are from [the petitioner]. As [the beneficiary] is an employee of [the petitioner], our company does not have the ability to assign her to any other company or to independently alter the terms of her assignment.

This work will be conducted at our office located at [REDACTED] [The beneficiary] will be supervised by [REDACTED] who are [REDACTED]

In his brief, the petitioner's vice president asserted that the evidence submitted is sufficient to show that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation position. He also cited the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)* and content from the Department of Labor's O*NET Internet site as support for that proposition.

V. ANALYSIS

To determine whether the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation position, the AAO turns first to the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1) and (2): a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position; and a degree requirement in a specific specialty is common to the industry in parallel positions among similar organizations or a particular position is so complex or unique that it can be performed only by an individual with a degree in a specific specialty. Factors considered by the AAO when determining these criteria include: whether the U.S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook (Handbook)*, on which the AAO routinely relies for the educational requirements of particular occupations, reports the industry requires a degree in a specific specialty; whether the industry's professional association has made a degree in a specific specialty 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)).

The AAO will first address the requirement under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(I): A baccalaureate or higher degree or its equivalent is normally the minimum requirement for entry into the particular position. The petitioner claimed in the LCA that the proffered position corresponds to SOC code and title 15-1121, Computer Systems Analysts from O*NET. In asserting that the proffered position requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, the petitioner's vice president asserted that O*NET supports this position.

On March 26, 2014, the AAO accessed the pertinent section of the O*NET Internet site, which addresses Computer Systems Analysts under the Department of Labor's Standard Occupational Classification code of 15-1121. Contrary to the petitioner's vice president's statement, O*NET does not state a requirement for a bachelor's degree for computer systems analyst positions. Rather, it assigns Computer Systems Analysts a Job Zone "Four" rating, which groups them among occupations of which "most," but not all, "require a four-year bachelor's degree."¹ Further, the O*NET does not indicate that four-year bachelor's degrees required by Job Zone Four occupations must be in a specific specialty closely related to the requirements of that occupation. Therefore, the O*NET information is not probative of the proffered position's being a specialty occupation.

The AAO recognizes the *Handbook*, which the petitioner's vice president cited in his appeal brief, as an authoritative source on the duties and educational requirements of the wide variety of occupations that it addresses.² The *Handbook* describes the occupation of "Computer Systems Analysts" as follows:

What Computer Systems Analysts Do

Computer systems analysts study an organization's current computer systems and procedures and design information systems solutions to help the organization operate more efficiently and effectively. They bring business and information technology (IT) together by understanding the needs and limitations of both.

Duties

Computer systems analysts typically do the following:

- Consult with managers to determine the role of the IT system in an organization
- Research emerging technologies to decide if installing them can increase the organization's efficiency and effectiveness

¹ For an explanation of Job Zones, see <http://www.onetonline.org/help/online/zones>.

² The *Handbook*, which is available in printed form, may also be accessed on the Internet, at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. The AAO's references to the *Handbook* are to the 2014 – 2015 edition available online.

- Prepare an analysis of costs and benefits so that management can decide if information systems and computing infrastructure upgrades are financially worthwhile
- Devise ways to add new functionality to existing computer systems
- Design and develop new systems by choosing and configuring hardware and software
- Oversee the installation and configuration of new systems to customize them for the organization
- Conduct testing to ensure that the systems work as expected
- Train the system's end users and write instruction manuals

Computer systems analysts use a variety of techniques to design computer systems such as data-modeling, which create rules for the computer to follow when presenting data, thereby allowing analysts to make faster decisions. Analysts conduct in-depth tests and analyze information and trends in the data to increase a system's performance and efficiency.

Analysts calculate requirements for how much memory and speed the computer system needs. They prepare flowcharts or other kinds of diagrams for programmers or engineers to use when building the system. Analysts also work with these people to solve problems that arise after the initial system is set up. Most analysts do some programming in the course of their work.

Most computer systems analysts specialize in certain types of computer systems that are specific to the organization they work with. For example, an analyst might work predominantly with financial computer systems or engineering systems.

Because systems analysts work closely with an organization's business leaders, they help the IT team understand how its computer systems can best serve the organization.

In some cases, analysts who supervise the initial installation or upgrade of IT systems from start to finish may be called IT project managers. They monitor a project's progress to ensure that deadlines, standards, and cost targets are met. IT project managers who plan and direct an organization's IT department or IT policies are included in the profile on computer and information systems managers.

Many computer systems analysts are general-purpose analysts who develop new systems or fine-tune existing ones; however, there are some specialized systems analysts. The following are examples of types of computer systems analysts:

Systems designers or **systems architects** specialize in helping organizations choose a specific type of hardware and software system. They translate the long-term business goals of an organization into technical solutions. Analysts develop a plan for the

computer systems that will be able to reach those goals. They work with management to ensure that systems and the IT infrastructure are set up to best serve the organization's mission.

Software quality assurance (QA) analysts do in-depth testing of the systems they design. They run tests and diagnose problems in order to make sure that critical requirements are met. QA analysts write reports to management recommending ways to improve the system.

Programmer analysts design and update their system's software and create applications tailored to their organization's needs. They do more coding and debugging than other types of analysts, although they still work extensively with management and business analysts to determine what business needs the applications are meant to address. Other occupations that do programming are computer programmers and software developers.

U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2014-15 ed., "Computer Systems Analysts," <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/computer-and-information-technology/computer-systems-analysts.htm> (last visited Mar. 26, 2014).

The duties [REDACTED] attributed to the proffered position are consistent with the duties of computer systems analysts as described in the *Handbook*, and, more particularly, with the subset of those positions designated "programmer analysts." On the balance, the AAO finds that the proffered position is a computer systems analyst position as described in the *Handbook*.

The *Handbook* states the following about the educational requirements of computer systems analyst positions:

How to Become a Computer Systems Analyst

A bachelor's degree in a computer or information science field is common, although not always a requirement. Some firms hire analysts with business or liberal arts degrees who have skills in information technology or computer programming.

Education

Most computer systems analysts have a bachelor's degree in a computer-related field. Because these analysts also are heavily involved in the business side of a company, it may be helpful to take business courses or major in management information systems.

Some employers prefer applicants who have a master of business administration (MBA) with a concentration in information systems. For more technically complex jobs, a master's degree in computer science may be more appropriate.

Although many computer systems analysts have technical degrees, such a degree is not always a requirement. Many analysts have liberal arts degrees and have gained programming or technical expertise elsewhere.

Many systems analysts continue to take classes throughout their careers so that they can learn about new and innovative technologies and keep their skills competitive. Technological advances come so rapidly in the computer field that continual study is necessary to remain competitive.

Systems analysts must understand the business field they are working in. For example, a hospital may want an analyst with a background or coursework in health management, and an analyst working for a bank may need to understand finance.

Advancement

With experience, systems analysts can advance to project manager and lead a team of analysts. Some can eventually become information technology (IT) directors or chief technology officers. For more information, see the profile on computer and information systems managers.

Important Qualities

Analytical skills. Analysts must interpret complex information from various sources and be able to decide the best way to move forward on a project. They must also be able to figure out how changes may affect the project.

Communication skills. Analysts work as a go-between with management and the IT department and must be able to explain complex issues in a way that both will understand.

Creativity. Because analysts are tasked with finding innovative solutions to computer problems, an ability to “think outside the box” is important.

Id. at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Computer-and-Information-Technology/Computer-systems-analysts.htm#tab-4> (last visited Mar. 26, 2014).

These statements from the *Handbook* do not indicate that a bachelor’s degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, is normally required for entry into this occupation. The AAO turns first to its statement that “most” systems analysts possess a bachelor’s degree in a computer-related field, which is not sufficient to satisfy 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1).

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 systems analyst positions require at least a bachelor's degree in computer science or a closely related field, it could be said that "most" systems analyst 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. 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.

Furthermore, with regard to systems analyst positions that do require attainment of a bachelor's degree or the equivalent, the *Handbook* indicates that a degree in a specific specialty is not normally required: the *Handbook* states that technical degrees are not always required, and that many systems analysts have liberal arts degrees and gained their programming or technical expertise "elsewhere."

The AAO will turn next to DOL's Occupational Information Network (O*NET), an alternative authoritative source cited by the petitioner. The AAO finds that O*NET does not establish that the proffered position qualifies as a specialty occupation under the first criterion described at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), either. In general, O*NET is not particularly useful in determining whether a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is a standard entry requirement for a given position, as O*NET's Job Zone designations make no mention of the specific field of study from which a degree must come. As was noted previously, the AAO interprets the term "degree" in the criteria at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A) to mean not just any baccalaureate or higher degree, but one in a specific specialty that is directly related to the proposed position. See *Royal Siam Corp. v. Chertoff*, 484 F.3d at 147. Furthermore, the Specialized Vocational Preparation (SVP) ratings, which are cited within O*Net's Job Zone designations, are meant to indicate only the total number of years of vocational preparation required for a particular position. The SVP ratings do not describe how those years are to be divided among training, formal education, and experience and it does not specify the particular type of degree, if any, that a position would require.

Finally, the AAO finds that, to the extent that they are described in the record of proceeding, the duties that [redacted] ascribes to the proffered position indicate a need for a range of technical knowledge in the computer/IT field, but do not establish any particular level of formal, postsecondary education leading to a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty as minimally necessary to attain such knowledge.

Where, as here, the *Handbook* does not support the proposition that the proffered position satisfies this first criterion of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A), it is incumbent upon the petitioner to provide persuasive evidence that the proffered position otherwise satisfies this criterion by a preponderance of the evidence standard, notwithstanding the absence of the *Handbook's* support on the issue. In such case, it is the petitioner's responsibility to provide probative evidence (e.g., documentation from other authoritative sources) that supports a favorable finding with regard to this criterion. The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iv) provides that "[a]n H-1B petition involving a specialty

occupation shall be accompanied by [d]ocumentation . . . or any other required evidence sufficient to establish . . . that the services the beneficiary is to perform are in a specialty occupation." Going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. *Matter of Soffici*, 22 I&N Dec. 158, 165 (Comm'r 1998) (citing *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm'r 1972)). In this case, the *Handbook* does not support the proposition that the proffered position satisfies 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(1), and the record of proceeding does not contain any persuasive documentary evidence from any other relevant authoritative source establishing that the proffered position's inclusion in this occupational category would be sufficient in and of itself to establish that a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent "is normally the minimum requirement for entry into [this] particular position."

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

Next, the AAO finds that the petitioner has not satisfied the first of the two alternative prongs of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). This prong alternatively calls for a petitioner to establish that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common (1) to the petitioner's industry; and (2) for positions within that industry that are both: (a) parallel to the proffered position, and (b) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner.

In determining whether there is a common degree requirement, factors often considered by USCIS include: whether the *Handbook* reports that the industry requires a degree; whether the industry's professional association has made a degree a minimum entry requirement; and whether letters or affidavits from firms or individuals in the industry attest that such firms "routinely employ and recruit only degreed individuals." See *Shanti, Inc. v. Reno*, 36 F. Supp. 2d at 1165 (quoting *Hird/Blaker Corp. v. Sava*, 712 F. Supp. at 1102).

Here and as already discussed, the petitioner has not established that the proffered position falls under an occupational category for which the *Handbook*, or other reliable and authoritative source, indicates that there is a standard, minimum entry requirement of at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. Also, there are no submissions from professional associations, individuals, or similar firms in the petitioner's industry attesting that individuals employed in positions parallel to the proffered position are routinely required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into those positions.

The petitioner did submit four vacancy announcements. In the appeal brief, the petitioner's vice president cited those vacancy announcements as evidence satisfying the alternative requirement of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2). Specifically, the petitioner submitted advertisements for the following positions posted on the Internet:

1. Business Systems Analyst I for [redacted] stating "A Bachelor's degree or equivalent experience in a related field (Business or

- Technology) preferred," and requiring "requiring 2-4 years of specific LOB or technology experience";
2. Computer Systems Analyst for [REDACTED] stating, "Minimum education of either a Bachelor's degree and five (5) years of experience or a Master's degree and one (1) year of experience. Degree and experience may be in any Science, Engineering, IT or Computer related field and foreign educational equivalent is acceptable";
 3. Business Systems Analyst (PM) for [REDACTED] requiring a bachelor's degree in management information systems and "2-5 years of experience liaising between business professionals and IT professionals in support of business improvement"; and
 4. Business Systems Analyst for [REDACTED] requiring a four-year degree in manufacturing technology or a related subject and five to seven years of previous related work experience including ERP experience."

The proposition to be demonstrated to satisfy the first of alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2) is that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common to parallel positions in similar organizations in the petitioner's industry. However, none of the organizations that placed those vacancy announcements have been shown to be in the petitioner's industry, and none have been shown to be in the insurance industry. Those vacancy announcements cannot be used to show that similar organizations *in the petitioner's industry* require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for parallel positions.

Further, the petitioner has not established that the organizations that placed those vacancy announcements are similar to the petitioner in any other sense. The petitioner has not shown that they share such characteristics as their number of employees or level of revenue, to list a few factors that may be considered. For this additional reason, those vacancy announcements cannot be used to show that *similar organizations* in the petitioner's industry require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for parallel positions.

Moreover, the first vacancy announcement states that a bachelor's degree or experience is *preferred*, rather than that it is required for the position announced. A preference is not a minimum requirement. Additionally, the first vacancy announcement states that "equivalent experience" may be substituted for the otherwise mandatory bachelor's degree, but with no indication of the type or amount of experience the hiring authority would consider to be equivalent to a degree. Furthermore, one of the subjects in which the preferred degree may be is business. A degree with a generalized title, such as business, without further specification, is not a degree in a specific specialty. *Cf. Matter of Michael Hertz Associates*, 19 I&N Dec. 558 (Comm'r. 1988).

Similarly, the second vacancy announcement suggests that a degree in any branch of engineering would be a sufficient educational qualification for the position announced. The field of engineering is a very broad category that covers numerous and various disciplines, some of which are only related through the basic principles of science and mathematics, e.g., nuclear engineering and aerospace engineering. Therefore, besides a degree in electrical engineering, it is not readily

apparent that a general degree in engineering or one of its other sub-specialties, such as chemical engineering or nuclear engineering, is closely related to computer science or that engineering or any and all engineering specialties are directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the particular position proffered in this matter. That the educational requirement of the position announced would be satisfied by a bachelor's degree in "any Science" is an even clearer indication that it does not require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. These are additional reasons that the second vacancy announcement cannot be used to show that similar organizations in the petitioner's industry require a minimum of a bachelor's degree *in a specific specialty* or its equivalent for parallel positions.

Yet further, as was noted above, the petitioner has designated the proffered position as a Level I position on the LCA, indicating that it is an entry-level position for an employee who has only basic understanding of the occupation. In order to attempt to show that parallel positions require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, the petitioner would be obliged to demonstrate that other Level I systems analyst positions, entry-level positions requiring only a basic understanding of systems analysis, require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, the proposition of which is not supported by the *Handbook*, as was explained above. Each of the vacancy announcements provided, however, requires experience, which is an indication that they are not Level I positions and not, therefore, positions parallel to the proffered position. For this additional reason, those vacancy announcements cannot be used to show that similar organizations in the petitioner's industry require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent *for parallel positions*.

Finally, even if all of the vacancy announcements were for parallel positions with organizations similar to the petitioner and in the petitioner's industry and required a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, the petitioner has failed to demonstrate what statistically valid inferences, if any, can be drawn from four announcements with regard to the common educational requirements for entry into parallel positions in similar organizations.³

³ Although the size of the relevant study population is unknown, the petitioner fails to demonstrate what statistically valid inferences, if any, can be drawn from these job advertisements with regard to determining 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 the position of systems analyst for firms similar to and in the same industry as the petitioner required a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent, it cannot be found that such a limited number of postings that appear to have been consciously selected could credibly refute the findings of the *Handbook* published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that such a position does not require at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty for entry into the occupation in the United States.

Thus, based upon a complete review of the record, the petitioner has not satisfied the first of the two alternative prongs described at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2), as the evidence of record does not establish that a requirement of a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is common (1) to the petitioner's industry; and (2) for positions within that industry that are both: (a) parallel to the proffered position, and (b) located in organizations that are similar to the petitioner.

The petitioner also has not satisfied the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2), which provides that "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." A review of the record indicates that the petitioner has failed to credibly demonstrate that the duties the beneficiary will be responsible for or perform on a day-to-day basis entail such complexity or uniqueness as to constitute a position so complex or unique that it can be performed only by a person with at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty.

Specifically, the petitioner failed to demonstrate how the duties described require the theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge such that a bachelor's or higher degree in a specific specialty, or its equivalent, is required to perform them. For instance, 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 proffered position. While a few related courses may be beneficial, or even required, in performing certain duties of the proffered 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 particular position here.

Further, as was noted above, the LCA submitted in support of the visa petition is approved for a Level I computer systems analyst, an indication that the proffered position is an entry-level position for an employee who has only a basic understanding of computer systems analyst duties. The *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance*⁴ issued by DOL states the following with regard to Level I wage rates:

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

⁴ 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 (last visited Mar. 26, 2014).

worker in training, or an internship are indicators that a Level I wage should be considered.

The petitioner has classified the proffered position at a Level I wage, which is only appropriate for a position requiring only "a basic understanding of the occupation" expected of a "worker in training" or an individual performing an "internship." That wage-level designation indicates further that the beneficiary will only be expected to "perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment." Still further, the selected wage rate indicates that the beneficiary is only required to have a basic understanding of the occupation; that she will be expected to perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment; that she will be closely supervised and her work closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy; and that she will receive specific instructions on required tasks and expected results.⁵

Accordingly, given the *Handbook's* indication that typical positions located within the "Computer Systems Analysts" occupational category do not require at least a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty, or the equivalent, for entry, it is not credible that a position involving limited, if any, exercise of independent judgment, close supervision and monitoring, receipt of specific instructions on required tasks and expected results, and close review *would* contain such a requirement.

This does not support the proposition that the proffered position is so complex or unique that it can only be performed by a person with a specific bachelor's degree, especially as the *Handbook* suggests that some computer systems analyst positions do not require such a degree.

Therefore, the evidence of record does not establish that this position is significantly different from other positions in the occupation such that it refutes the *Handbook's* information to the effect that there is a spectrum of preferred degrees acceptable for such positions, including degrees not in a specific specialty. 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. As the petitioner fails to demonstrate how the proffered position is so complex or unique relative to other positions within the same occupational category that do not require at least a baccalaureate degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for entry into the occupation in the United States, it cannot be concluded that the petitioner has satisfied the second alternative prong of 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(2).

The AAO will next address the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3), which may be satisfied if the petitioner demonstrates that it normally requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for the proffered position.⁶

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ While a petitioner may believe or otherwise assert that a proffered position requires a degree, that opinion alone without corroborating evidence cannot establish the position as a specialty occupation. Were USCIS limited solely to reviewing a petitioner's claimed self-imposed requirements, then any individual with a

As was explained above, and for the reasons explained, the AAO, relying on *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d at 387-388, believes that where the work is to be performed for entities other than the petitioner, the educational requirement imposed on the position by the client company is the critical consideration. In his appeal brief, the petitioner's vice president argued, that, to the contrary, the petitioner's requirement of a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for the proffered position is sufficient.

The AAO continues to disagree, based on the reasoning discussed above. The AAO finds that, because the record contains no evidence of the educational requirement imposed on the proffered position by the end client, the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3).

However, the AAO also notes that the record contains no evidence pertinent to the educational qualifications of anyone that the petitioner has ever previously hired anyone to fill the proffered position. Thus, even if counsel's position were accepted, the evidence of record would still not demonstrate that the petitioner normally requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for the proffered position.

Moreover, the record contains evidence that the petitioner *does not* require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent for the position. Specifically, in his March 18, 2013 letter, the petitioner's vice president stated, "[a]s with any Systems Analyst position, the usual minimum requirement for performance of the job duties is a bachelor's degree, or equivalent, in computers, engineering, or a related field." If he meant to assert that the educational requirement that the petitioner places on the proffered position would be satisfied by an otherwise undifferentiated bachelor's degree in engineering,⁷ this would be tantamount to an admission that the proffered position does not require a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent and does not qualify as a specialty occupation position, for the reason explained above in the discussion of otherwise undifferentiated bachelor's degrees in engineering.

bachelor's degree could be brought to the United States to perform any occupation as long as the employer artificially created a token degree requirement, whereby all individuals employed in a particular position possessed a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent. See *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F. 3d at 387. In other words, if a petitioner's degree requirement is only symbolic and the proffered position does not in fact require such a specialty degree or its equivalent to perform its duties, the occupation would not meet the statutory or regulatory definition of a specialty occupation. See § 214(i)(1) of the Act; 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "specialty occupation").

⁷ Again, the field of engineering is a broad category that covers numerous and various specialties; some of which are only related through the basic principles of science and mathematics, e.g., nuclear engineering and aerospace engineering. Therefore, besides a degree in electrical engineering, it is not readily apparent that a general degree in engineering or one of its other sub-specialties, such as chemical engineering or nuclear engineering, is closely related to computer science or that engineering or any and all engineering specialties are directly related to the duties and responsibilities of the particular position proffered in this matter.

Further, in his brief, the petitioner's vice president stated that "[t]he fact that the Petitioner normally requires a minimum of a Bachelor's degree for the position offered to the Beneficiary is sufficient to establish that the position is in fact a specialty occupation" and further stated that "[the petitioner] does require a minimum of a Bachelor's degree for each Systems Analyst position." The petitioner has not claimed, and the evidence of record does not establish, that the petitioner requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree *in a specific specialty* or its equivalent for positions such as the one proffered here.

For all of those reasons, the petitioner has not satisfied the criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(3).

Finally, the AAO will address the alternative criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4), which is satisfied if the petitioner establishes that the nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform them is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

Finally, the AAO will address the alternative criterion at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4), which is satisfied if the petitioner establishes that the nature of the specific duties is so specialized and complex that knowledge required to perform them is usually associated with the attainment of a baccalaureate or higher degree in a specific specialty or its equivalent.

Again, relative specialization and complexity have not been sufficiently developed by the petitioner as an aspect of the proffered position. Nothing about the duties of the proffered position, such as providing system solutions, leading business scenario teams, interacting with the subject matter experts and business analysts to solidify the testing approach, preparing test strategies, etc., suggests that they are more specialized and complex than the duties of other computer systems analyst positions.

Moreover, the AAO finds that both on its own terms and also in comparison with the three higher wage-levels that can be designated in an LCA, by the submission of an LCA certified for a Level I wage-level, the petitioner effectively attests that the proposed duties are of relatively low complexity as compared to others within the same occupational category. This fact is materially inconsistent with the level of complexity required by this criterion.

As earlier noted, the *Prevailing Wage Determination Policy Guidance* issued by DOL states the following with regard to Level I wage rates:

Level I (entry) wage rates are assigned to job offers for beginning level employees who have only a basic understanding of the occupation. These employees perform routine tasks that require limited, if any, exercise of judgment. The tasks provide experience and familiarization with the employer's methods, practices, and programs. The employees may perform higher level work for training and developmental purposes. These employees work under close supervision and receive specific instructions on required

tasks and results expected. Their work is closely monitored and reviewed for accuracy. Statements that the job offer is for a research fellow, a worker in training, or an internship are indicators that a Level I wage should be considered [emphasis in original].

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 (last visited Mar. 26, 2014).

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

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

Id.

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

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

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

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

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

Id.

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

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

Id.

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

For all of these reasons, the evidence in the record of proceeding fails to establish that the proposed duties meet the specialization and complexity threshold at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(A)(4).

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

On appeal, the petitioner cites a memorandum entitled "*Guidance Memorandum on H1B Computer Related Positions*," from Terry Way, Nebraska Service Director, to Center Adjudications Officers (Nebraska Service Center, December 22, 2000).

The AAO finds that the petitioner's reliance on this December 22, 2000 service center memorandum is misplaced as the memorandum is irrelevant to this proceeding. By its very terms, the memorandum was issued by the then Director of the NSC as an attempt to "clarify" an aspect of NSC adjudications; and, framed as it was, as a memorandum to NSC adjudication's officers, it was addressed exclusively to NSC personnel within that director's chain of command. As such, it has no force and effect upon the present matter, which was initially adjudicated by the California Service Center and is now before the AAO on appeal.

It is also noted that the legacy memorandum cited by the petitioner does not bear a "P" designation. According to the Adjudicator's Field Manual (AFM) § 3.4, "correspondence is advisory in nature, intended only to convey the author's point of view. . . ." AFM § 3.4 goes on to note that examples of correspondence include letters, memoranda not bearing the "P" designation, unpublished AAO decisions, USCIS and DHS General Counsel Opinions, etc. Regardless, the NSC no longer adjudicates H-1B petitions and, therefore, the memorandum is not followed by any USCIS officers even as a matter of internal, service center guidance.

Even if the AAO were bound by this memorandum either as a management directive or as a matter of law, it was issued more than a decade ago, during what the NSC Director perceived as a period of "transition" for certain-computer related occupations; that the memorandum referred to now outdated versions of the *Handbook* (the latest of those being the 2000-2001 edition); and that the memorandum also relied partly on a perceived line of relatively early unpublished (and unspecified) AAO decisions in the area of computer-related occupations, which did not address the computer-related occupations as they have evolved since those decisions were issued more than a decade ago.⁸ In any event, the memorandum reminds adjudicators that a specialty occupation eligibility determination is not based on the proffered position's job title but instead on the actual duties to be performed. For all of the reasons articulated above, the memorandum is immaterial to this discussion regarding the job duties of the petitioner's proffered position and whether the petitioner has satisfied its burden of establishing that this particular position qualifies as a specialty occupation.

For all of these reasons, 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.

The AAO observes that, in addition, even if the duties the beneficiary would perform on the project at Nationwide had been established to be specialty occupation duties, the duration of that project has not been established. Although the petitioner asserts that it will continue through September 3, 2016, evidence in the record suggests otherwise.

In his March 24, 2013 letter, the Vice President, Product Development, at [REDACTED] Corporation stated, "[The [REDACTED] is expected to go until till [sic] end of [2014]. Even assuming that officer of [REDACTED] has accurate and authoritative information, the [REDACTED] project does not appear to have then been expected to last beyond 2014. Subsequently, in his July 31, 2013 letter, [REDACTED] stated, "This project is expected to last to at least January 2015 with expected extensions if necessary." The phrase "with expected extensions if necessary" does not provide any reliable indication that the [REDACTED] will extend beyond January 2015.

Although the petitioner was informed, in the April 25, 2013 RFE, that the record contained insufficient evidence to establish that the beneficiary would work at [REDACTED] location on

⁸ While 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(c) provides that AAO precedent decisions are binding on all USCIS employees in the administration of the Act, unpublished decisions are not similarly binding.

project throughout the period of requested employment, the record still contains insufficient evidence to demonstrate that, if the visa petition were approved, [REDACTED] would continue to require the beneficiary's services after January 2015.

Therefore, even if the proffered position had been demonstrated to be a specialty occupation position, and the visa petition were otherwise approvable, the visa petition still would not be approvable for any time after January 2015.

VI. ADDITIONAL BASES

The record suggests additional issues that were not addressed in the decision of denial but that, nonetheless, also preclude approval of this visa petition.

Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act defines an H-1B nonimmigrant in pertinent part as an alien:

subject to section 212(j)(2), who is coming temporarily to the United States to perform services . . . in a specialty occupation described in section 214(i)(1) . . . , who meets the requirements for the occupation specified in section 214(i)(2) . . . , and with respect to whom the Secretary of Labor determines and certifies to the [Secretary of Homeland Security] that the intending employer has filed with the Secretary [of Labor] an application under section 212(n)(1)

The term "United States employer" is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) as follows:

United States employer means a person, firm, corporation, contractor, or other association, or organization in the United States which:

- (1) Engages a person to work within the United States;
- (2) *Has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee; and*
- (3) Has an Internal Revenue Service Tax identification number.

(Emphasis added); *see also* 56 Fed. Reg. 61111, 61121 (Dec. 2, 1991).

The record is not persuasive in establishing that the petitioner will have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary.

Although "United States employer" is defined in the regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii), it is noted that the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship" are not defined for purposes of the

H-1B visa classification. Section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act indicates that an alien coming to the United States to perform services in a specialty occupation will have an "intending employer" who will file a Labor Condition Application with the Secretary of Labor pursuant to section 212(n)(1) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1) (2012). The intending employer is described as offering full-time or part-time "employment" to the H-1B "employee." Subsections 212(n)(1)(A)(i) and 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1182(n)(1)(A)(i), (2)(C)(vii) (2012). Further, the regulations indicate that "United States employers" must file a Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker (Form I-129) in order to classify aliens as H-1B temporary "employees." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(1), (2)(i)(A). Finally, the definition of "United States employer" indicates in its second prong that the petitioner must have an "employer-employee relationship" with the "employees under this part," i.e., the H-1B beneficiary, and that this relationship be evidenced by the employer's ability to "hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of any such employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining the term "United States employer").

Neither the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) nor U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) defined the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship" by regulation for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, even though the regulation describes H-1B beneficiaries as being "employees" who must have an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer." *Id.* Therefore, for purposes of the H-1B visa classification, these terms are undefined.

The United States Supreme Court has determined that where federal law fails to clearly define the term "employee," courts should conclude that the term was "intended to describe the conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine." *Nationwide Mutual Ins. Co. v. Darden*, 503 U.S. 318, 322-323 (1992) (hereinafter "*Darden*") (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. 730 (1989)). The Supreme Court stated:

"In determining whether a hired party is an employee under the general common law of agency, we consider the hiring party's right to control the manner and means by which the product is accomplished. Among the other factors relevant to this inquiry are the skill required; the source of the instrumentalities and tools; the location of the work; the duration of the relationship between the parties; whether the hiring party has the right to assign additional projects to the hired party; the extent of the hired party's discretion over when and how long to work; the method of payment; the hired party's role in hiring and paying assistants; whether the work is part of the regular business of the hiring party; whether the hiring party is in business; the provision of employee benefits; and the tax treatment of the hired party."

Darden, 503 U.S. at 323-324 (quoting *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid*, 490 U.S. at 751-752); see also *Clackamas Gastroenterology Associates, P.C. v. Wells*, 538 U.S. 440, 445 (2003) (hereinafter "*Clackamas*"). As the common-law test contains "no shorthand formula or magic phrase that can be applied to find the answer, . . . all of the incidents of the relationship must be assessed and weighed with no one factor being decisive." *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324 (quoting *NLRB v. United Ins. Co. of America*, 390 U.S. 254, 258 (1968)).

In this matter, the Act does not exhibit a legislative intent to extend the definition of "employer" in

section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, "employment" in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or "employee" in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. *See generally* 136 Cong. Rec. S17106 (daily ed. Oct. 26, 1990); 136 Cong. Rec. H12358 (daily ed. Oct. 27, 1990). On the contrary, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the regulations define the term "United States employer" to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition.⁹

Specifically, the regulatory definition of "United States employer" requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to engage a person to work within the United States, and to have an "employer-employee relationship" with the H-1B "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly,

⁹ While the *Darden* court considered only the definition of "employee" under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 ("ERISA"), 29 U.S.C. § 1002(6), and did not address the definition of "employer," courts have generally refused to extend the common law agency definition to ERISA's use of employer because "the definition of 'employer' in ERISA, unlike the definition of 'employee,' clearly indicates legislative intent to extend the definition beyond the traditional common law definition." *See, e.g., Bowers v. Andrew Weir Shipping, Ltd.*, 810 F. Supp. 522 (S.D.N.Y. 1992), *aff'd*, 27 F.3d 800 (2nd Cir.), *cert. denied*, 513 U.S. 1000 (1994).

However, in this matter, the Act does not exhibit a legislative intent to extend the definition of "employer" in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, "employment" in section 212(n)(1)(A)(i) of the Act, or "employee" in section 212(n)(2)(C)(vii) of the Act beyond the traditional common law definitions. Instead, in the context of the H-1B visa classification, the term "United States employer" was defined in the regulations to be even more restrictive than the common law agency definition. A federal agency's interpretation of a statute whose administration is entrusted to it is to be accepted unless Congress has spoken directly on the issue. *See Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.*, 467 U.S. 837, 844-845 (1984).

The regulatory definition of "United States employer" requires H-1B employers to have a tax identification number, to employ persons in the United States, and to have an "employer-employee relationship" with the H-1B "employee." 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii). Accordingly, the term "United States employer" not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an "employer-employee relationship" as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms "employee," "employed," "employment" or "employer-employee relationship" indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition." Therefore, in the absence of an intent to impose broader definitions by either Congress or USCIS, the "conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine," and the *Darden* construction test, apply to the terms "employee," "employer-employee relationship," "employed," and "employment" as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h). That being said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term "employer" than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. *See, e.g.,* section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to "unaffiliated employers" supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of unauthorized aliens).

the term "United States employer" not only requires H-1B employers and employees to have an "employer-employee relationship" as understood by common-law agency doctrine, it imposes additional requirements of having a tax identification number and to employ persons in the United States. The lack of an express expansion of the definition regarding the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship" combined with the agency's otherwise generally circular definition of United States employer in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) indicates that the regulations do not intend to extend the definition beyond "the traditional common law definition" or, more importantly, that construing these terms in this manner would thwart congressional design or lead to absurd results. *Cf. Darden*, 503 U.S. at 318-319.¹⁰

Accordingly, in the absence of an express congressional intent to impose broader definitions, both the "conventional master-servant relationship as understood by common-law agency doctrine" and the *Darden* construction test apply to the terms "employee" and "employer-employee relationship" as used in section 101(a)(15)(H)(i)(b) of the Act, section 212(n) of the Act, and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h).¹¹

Therefore, in considering whether or not one will be an "employee" in an "employer-employee relationship" with a "United States employer" for purposes of H-1B nonimmigrant petitions, USCIS must focus on the common-law touchstone of "control." *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450; *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(ii) (defining a "United States employer" as one who "has an employer-employee relationship with respect to employees under this part, as indicated by the fact that it may hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise *control* the work of any such employee" (emphasis added)).

The factors indicating that a worker is or will be an "employee" of an "employer" are clearly delineated in both the *Darden* and *Clackamas* decisions. *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324; *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 445; *see also* *Restatement (Second) of Agency* § 220(2) (1958). Such indicia of control include when, where, and how a worker performs the job; the continuity of the worker's relationship with the employer; the tax treatment of the worker; the provision of employee benefits; and whether the work performed by the worker is part of the employer's regular business. *See Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 445; *see also* *New Compliance Manual*, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, § 2-III(A)(1) (adopting a materially identical test and indicating that said test was based on the *Darden* decision); *see also* *Defensor v. Meissner*, 201 F.3d 384, 388 (5th Cir. 2000) (determining that hospitals, as the recipients of beneficiaries' services, are the "true employers" of H-1B nurses under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h),

¹⁰ To the extent the regulations are ambiguous with regard to the terms "employee" or "employer-employee relationship," the agency's interpretation of these terms should be found to be controlling unless "plainly erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation." *Auer v. Robbins*, 519 U.S. 452, 461 (1997) (citing *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 359, 109 S.Ct. 1835, 1850, 104 L.Ed.2d 351 (1989) (quoting *Bowles v. Seminole Rock & Sand Co.*, 325 U.S. 410, 414, 65 S.Ct. 1215, 1217, 89 L.Ed. 1700 (1945))).

¹¹ That said, there are instances in the Act where Congress may have intended a broader application of the term "employer" than what is encompassed in the conventional master-servant relationship. *See, e.g.*, section 214(c)(2)(F) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1184(c)(2)(F) (referring to "unaffiliated employers" supervising and controlling L-1B intracompany transferees having specialized knowledge); section 274A of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1324a (referring to the employment of unauthorized aliens).

even though a medical contract service agency is the actual petitioner, because the hospitals ultimately hire, pay, fire, supervise, or otherwise control the work of the beneficiaries).

It is important to note, however, that the factors listed in *Darden* and *Clackamas* are not exhaustive and must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Other aspects of the relationship between the parties relevant to control may affect the determination of whether an employer-employee relationship exists. Furthermore, not all or even a majority of the listed criteria need be met; however, the fact finder must weigh and compare a combination of the factors in analyzing the facts of each individual case. The determination must be based on all of the circumstances in the relationship between the parties, regardless of whether the parties refer to it as an employee or as an independent contractor relationship. See *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 448-449; *New Compliance Manual* at § 2-III(A)(1).

Furthermore, when examining the factors relevant to determining control, USCIS must assess and weigh each actual factor itself as it exists or will exist and not the claimed employer's right to influence or change that factor, unless specifically provided for by the common-law test. See *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 323-324. For example, while the assignment of additional projects is dependent on who has the *right* to assign them, it is the *actual* source of the instrumentalities and tools that must be examined, not who has the *right* to provide the tools required to complete an assigned project. See *id.* at 323.

Lastly, the "mere existence of a document styled 'employment agreement'" shall not lead inexorably to the conclusion that the worker is an employee. *Clackamas*, 538 U.S. at 450. "Rather, . . . the answer to whether [an individual] is an employee depends on 'all of the incidents of the relationship . . . with no one factor being decisive.'" *Id.* at 451 (quoting *Darden*, 503 U.S. at 324).

Applying the *Darden* and *Clackamas* tests to this matter, the petitioner has not established that it will be a "United States employer" having an "employer-employee relationship" with the beneficiary as an H-1B temporary "employee."

Various documents submitted state the conclusion that the beneficiary will be an employee of the petitioner. However, the issue is not whether the petitioner, or [REDACTED] or the end-client have opted to call the beneficiary an employee of the petitioner, but rather whether the facts of this case demonstrate that the petitioner and the beneficiary will have an employer-employee relationship as explained above. While social security contributions, worker's compensation contributions, unemployment insurance contributions, federal and state income tax withholdings, and other benefits are still relevant factors in determining who will control an alien beneficiary, other incidents of the relationship, e.g., who will oversee and direct the work of the beneficiary, who will provide the instrumentalities and tools, where will the work be located, and who has the right or ability to affect the projects to which the alien beneficiary is assigned, must also be assessed and weighed in order to make a determination as to who will be the beneficiary's employer.

The March 24, 2013 letter of [REDACTED] vice president for product development states the following:

[The petitioner] retains supervisory control of [the beneficiary] including the right to hire and fire her and to receive periodic reports from her and retains the right to control [the beneficiary's] daily activities and the manner and means of her work, if required.

However, that letter also states that [REDACTED] an application development manager for Nationwide, will supervise the beneficiary.

Similarly, in his July 31, 2013 letter, [REDACTED] stated the following:

[The petitioner] retains supervisory control of [the beneficiary] including the right to hire and fire her and to receive periodic reports from her and retains the right to control [the beneficiary's] daily activities and the manner and means of her work, if required.

However, [REDACTED] who appears to be another [REDACTED] employee, will supervise the beneficiary.

The beneficiary will work at [REDACTED] project, and she will be supervised by two [REDACTED] employees. That the beneficiary may telephone the petitioner, and label it "supervision," is not persuasive. The evidence makes clear, and the AAO finds that, assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, the petitioner will not assign the beneficiary's duties and supervise her performance. The AAO further finds that although the petitioner will pay the beneficiary's wages, based on the totality of the circumstances shown in this case, if the instant visa petition were approved the petitioner would not have an employer-employee relationship with the beneficiary. For this additional reason, the petition may not be approved.

VII. 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 director's decision will be affirmed and the petition will be denied for the above stated reasons, with each considered as an independent and alternative basis for the decision.¹² 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.

¹² Because these matters preclude approval of the petition, the AAO will not further discuss any additional issues, deficiencies, or unresolved questions it has observed in the record of proceeding.