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## Fallacy of foreigners taking US jobs

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Foreign students are drivers of economic growth and the U.S. should retain more of them to fill jobs in STEM fields. So says the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Brookings Institution, the Cato Institute, the Pew Research Center, the Congressional Research Service, and many, many other well-established public and private research organizations.

There persists, however, an opposing viewpoint of immigration and economics that has been widely acknowledged as a fallacy by economists: that there are only a finite number of jobs in the U.S. economy and therefore, each foreign worker is competing directly with a U.S. worker for any given job.

This is called the “lump of labor fallacy.” It is perennially invoked by immigration restrictionists, and repeatedly refuted by the data and economic reality. This same theory has been used in the past to discourage women, Hispanics, and most other minority groups from joining the workforce.

Previously, I discussed the reasons that we must work harder to attract and retain foreign graduates in STEM fields—students who are already in the U.S., studying in STEM fields at U.S. academic institutions, but who will have very few options to apply those skills and knowledge here in the U.S. upon graduation.

Consider that foreign students earn over half of all advanced STEM degrees in the U.S. and that, in 2014 alone, international students and their families at colleges and universities across the U.S. contributed \$26.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 340,000 jobs.

Now consider that international enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities as a percentage of the total is 3.9 percent, compared to 26 percent in Australia and 19 percent in the UK.

The H-1B visa category is a prime example of our inefficient and arbitrary system because it is currently the only visa category that we have specifically for high-skilled professionals, like the

ones graduating from our academic institutions. This critical visa is issued based on a random, computer-generated lottery.

There are 65,000 slots available to bachelor's degree holders and 20,000 slots *reserved solely for U.S. master's degree* holders. Last year, there was a 70 percent likelihood that a U.S. employer's application would be rejected for review.

In a response to my article, a reader presented several inaccurate "alternatives" for STEM workers:

- The M-1 visa is a vocational/nonacademic training visa, not for multinational transferees. The visa the reader meant to cite is only available to multinational companies with branches/subsidiaries abroad, who are transferring their own essential employees to the U.S., and then only to employees who have been employed abroad for at least one year.
- The J-1 visa for researchers and professors is reserved for individuals who are currently in teaching or research positions at government or academic institutions abroad and are being sponsored by government or academic institutions in the U.S.
- The O-1 visa is reserved for individuals of "extraordinary ability" who have achieved sustained national and/or international recognition in their field of expertise.

None of these are viable pathways for foreign students who are graduating from our colleges and universities.

Any STEM-qualified person that our "regular immigration" brings to the U.S. is unable to live and work in the U.S. without running up against barriers imposed by our immigration system. Refugees are entirely irrelevant to this discussion, as they are eligible for unrestricted work authorization upon entry to the U.S.

Equally inaccurate are the reader's statements on the STEM surplus. For the record, the "study" cited in the reader's response comes from an organization well known for its anti-immigration positions, and which has been repeatedly discredited for putting out reports that misrepresent statistics and employ dubious methodologies and specious analysis.

A Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce study conducted specifically to address these debates surrounding STEM jobs found that:

1. Our education system is not producing enough STEM-capable students to keep up with increasing demand.
2. STEM wages at all occupational levels grow much faster than other occupations. In STEM occupations where growth has been slower, the underlying reason is a much higher initial wage.

3. Discrepancies between finding a STEM surplus vs. a STEM shortage is largely due to diversion of STEM students into other academic disciplines. For instance, STEM curricula in math and science can lead to occupations ranging from architecture to business to finance to medicine.
4. Foreign-born STEM workers provide a net benefit to the American economy because they are unusually innovative and create more jobs than they take from native born Americans.

The Department of Labor finds that “STEM covers a diverse array of occupations, from mathematicians to biomedical researchers, and at degree levels from bachelor to Ph.D. Some occupations have a shortage of qualified talent, such as nuclear and electrical engineering Ph.D.’s who are U.S. citizens; in other areas, such as biology Ph.D.’s aiming to become professors, there is a surplus.”

It is possible, therefore, to have a shortage in certain STEM fields, while simultaneously experiencing a surplus in others. It’s not that there are NO STEM-qualified U.S. workers, just not enough to keep up with demand in specific STEM fields.

In today’s globalized economy, borders are increasingly irrelevant to the labor force of the future. We must work harder at examining our own labor shortfalls, utilizing immigration as a powerful policy tool to bridge those gaps and fulfill our economic needs.