

Knowing What Ain't So

By [Mark Krikorian](#)

July 9, 2012 1:39 A.M.

Everyone seems to agree that we don't have enough American post-graduates in scientific fields. [Obama and Romney](#). [Bloomberg and Murdoch](#). [Jeff Flake](#) and [Chuck Schumer](#). The [Center for American Progress](#) and the [Cato Institute](#). Heck, even *I've* sort of backed [green cards](#) for foreign students getting Ph.D.s, though more as a way to preempt the push to include master's degree recipients, which would result in diploma mills and the transformation of technical and scientific work into "jobs Americans won't do".

Well, what everyone agrees is true turns out to be a steaming pile of [equine excreta](#):

Michelle Amaral wanted to be a brain scientist to help cure diseases. She planned a traditional academic science career: PhD, university professorship and, eventually, her own lab.

But three years after earning a doctorate in neuroscience, she gave up trying to find a permanent job in her field.

Dropping her dream, she took an administrative position at her university, experiencing firsthand an economic reality that, at first look, is counterintuitive: There are too many laboratory scientists for too few jobs.

That reality runs counter to messages sent by President Obama and the National Science Foundation and other influential groups, who in recent years have called for U.S. universities to churn out more scientists. ...

Although the overall unemployment rate of chemists and other scientists is much lower than the national average, those figures mask an open secret: Many scientists work outside their chosen field.

“They’ll be employed in something,” said Michael S. Teitelbaum, a senior adviser to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation who studies the scientific workforce. “But they go and do other things because they can’t find the position they spent their 20s preparing for.” . . .

Like many scientists, Amaral grew disillusioned with the system that left her with an expensive degree but few job options. She left her lab in December after federal funding for her post-doc position ran out. She now works as an administrator at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and is in a “holding pattern,” unsure whether — or how — to advance a science career she spent more than a decade working toward.

“I’ve listened to this stuff on the news about how we need more scientists and engineers,” she said. “I’m thinking, ‘What are you talking about?’ We’re here. We need something to do besides manual labor for another academic person.”

Haas, the former drug company chemist, has even harsher words. She plans to “get out of Jersey and get out of science” when her daughter graduates from high school in two years. “She’s very good at everything, very smart,” Haas said of her daughter. “She loves chemistry, loves math. I tell her, ‘Don’t go into science.’ I’ve made that very clear to her.”

(Of course, the *Post* story studiously avoids the “I” Word, as though immigration proposals aren’t at the center of the bipartisan elite’s response to the supposed scientist gap.)

So what’s behind the numerous proposals to staple green cards to foreign students’ diplomas? [In the words](#) of a writer at *Science* magazine, “a desire for cheap, skilled labor.” Because whether it’s farm hands or tech workers,

employers want their cronies in Washington to use the federal immigration program to flood their labor markets and keep down wages. As Adam Smith said, “People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public.”