

December 4, 2012

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:

The Information Technology Industry Council, the Partnership for a New American Economy, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently joined together to prepare a new report, released last week, "[Help Wanted: The Role of Foreign Workers in the Innovation Economy](#)". According to the report, foreign-born professionals in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are complementing—not displacing—their U.S. counterparts and the U.S. economy is in need of more STEM talent.

As Congress deliberates initiatives to reform our immigration system—including expanding visas for those with advanced STEM degrees earned at U.S. universities—the report provides evidence of critical labor force needs in America’s innovation economy.

There is universal agreement that reforming U.S. education and job training to encourage more U.S. students to enter STEM occupations is essential to a strong economy. Yet these fixes will take years to yield results, and many of the talented STEM workers who could fill the gaps in our labor force are already here training in American universities. Reforming American immigration laws to allow foreign-born STEM students who earn advanced degrees from U.S. universities to stay and work in jobs where there are no available qualified American workers will fill an immediate need and promote economic growth and job creation.

Our report analyzes data from the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Education Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to examine employment in the STEM fields. The report confirms that:

- **There is full employment for U.S. STEM workers with advanced degrees:** While the current national unemployment rate hovers around 8 percent, the unemployment rate for United States citizens with PhDs in STEM fields is just 3.15 percent, and 3.4 percent for those with master’s degrees in STEM fields. Given that the U.S. government has defined “full-employment” to be 4 percent, this suggests a skills shortage of STEM professionals with advanced degrees.
- **In many STEM occupations, unemployment is virtually non-existent:** Unemployment is particularly low in STEM occupations such as Petroleum Engineers (0.1 percent), Computer Network Architects (0.4 percent), Nuclear Engineers (0.5 percent), Environmental Scientists and Geoscientists (1.2 percent), Database Administrators (1.3 percent), Statisticians (1.6 percent), Engineering Managers (1.6 percent), and Aerospace Engineers (1.9 percent).
- **STEM fields employ a far higher proportion of foreign workers than non-STEM fields:** In STEM fields, 26.1 percent of workers with PhDs are foreign born, as are 17.7 percent of workers with master’s degrees. In comparison, in non-STEM fields, just 6.4 percent of doctoral workers and 5.2 percent of master’s workers are foreign born.

- **STEM fields with high percentages of foreign STEM workers have low unemployment rates for US workers:** Although nearly 25 percent of medical scientists are foreign born, United States medical scientists enjoy an unemployment rate of just 3.4 percent, fully five percentage points lower than the non-STEM unemployment rate (8.4 percent). Similar stories exist for STEM occupations such as physical scientists and computer software designers, where immigrants make up more than 20 percent of the field and unemployment is just 4 percent. Unemployment across all STEM occupations is just 4.3 percent, and the unemployment rate is even lower in 10 of the 11 STEM occupations with the largest proportion of foreign workers.
- **Foreign-born STEM workers are paid on par with US STEM workers:** There is no verifiable evidence that foreign-born STEM workers adversely affect the wages of American workers by providing a less expensive source of labor. The average STEM worker actually makes slightly more than his or her United States counterpart, earning on average \$61 more per week.

These findings reaffirm a December 2011 report, "[Immigration and American Jobs](#)," released by the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, which found that every foreign graduate with an advanced degree from a U.S. university who stays and works in a STEM field, creates an average of 2.62 new jobs for American workers.

We are committed to reforming our immigration system in ways that advance U.S. competitiveness, innovation, and job creation, and look forward to working with you to achieve this important goal.

Sincerely,

Information Technology Industry Council  
Partnership for a New American Economy  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce