Are They the Best and the Brightest?
Analysis of Employer-Sponsored Tech Immigrants

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The Setting

"[restrictive U.S. immigration policy is] driving away the world's best and brightest"—Bill Gates, 2007

"We should not [send our] bright and talented international students...to work for our competitors abroad upon graduation"–NAFSA (Nat. Assoc. of Foreign Student Advisers)

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- And for those that ARE of outstanding talent:
  - What nations do they come from?
  - Does existing policy serve them well?
Quantitative Approaches

We will approach the question via analyses of:
- wages
- dissertation awards
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Due to wording of law, the legally required prevailing wage is typically well below the actual market wage. Employers claim to hire foreign workers due to their "hot" skill sets. A skill typically brings a 15% premium, more in combination. But prevailing does not factor in skills. Nor is educational level factored in. Can legally get a Master's worker for a Bachelor's price. Underpayment found to be 15-20% in (Matloff, 2003) and 33% in (Ong, 1997). NRC and GAO employer surveys found many employers admitting to (legally) paying H-1B workers less than comparable Americans.
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Solutions

How does one use wages to assess talent, given underpayment of foreign workers? One can:

- Use as a baseline wage 20% above the legal prevailing wage.
- Consider only workers who were originally sponsored by employers but now have green cards or citizenship.
- Consider nonmonetary evidence of outstanding talent, such as awards and patents.
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- Accounts for region via prevailing wage.
- Lacks data on education, age.
PERM Analysis

I calculated the median wage ratio: 

\[ WR = \text{median of actual wage employed claimed prior wage} \]

By law, must have 

\[ WR \geq 1. \]

But, denominator too small by factor of 1.15 to 1.33 (see above).

So, only (median) values higher than, say 1.25, indicate a firm is hiring mainly the "best and brightest."
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PERM Results

Median WR for some prominent firms, in general and for software engineers:

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Second Wage Analysis: 2000 Census Data

5% PUMS sample

Looked at all programmers, software engineers and electrical engineers in California.

Proxy for employer sponsorship: Entered country after age 17.

Considered only those over 30, by which time sponsored workers should have green cards and thus be free of exploitation.

No public data on employer name, worker nationality.
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Logistic regression:
probability of Salary > $150

\[ K = \text{logit}(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Age} + \beta_2 \text{MS} + \beta_3 \text{PhD} + \beta_4 \text{TmpVisa} + \beta_5 \text{China} + \beta_6 \text{India}) \]
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But anyway, no evidence of “foreign genius” from any nationality.
ACM Dissertation Awards

Assoc. for Computing Machinery, the main professional CS body

58 awards since 1982

2 from China, 8 from India (judging from names)

Among PhDs, the PUMS data indicate that about 12% are from China and 23% from India. So, Indians, Chinese underrepresented.

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Final Remarks

Most of the sponsored foreign workers appear to be of ordinary talent. But again, some are indeed truly outstanding, including various Nobel laureates such as C.N. Yang, Fields Medal winners such as S.T. Yau, plus many whose names are never in the newspaper but really are superb intellects. We should facilitate the immigration of such talents. Recently there has been some concern about long green card waits for employer-sponsored workers. However, for PhDs, who have their own category, the wait continues to be short.
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These slides, and the R programming code used to compile the statistics, will be available at http://heather.cs.ucdavis.edu/BGIT.html.
(“Footnotes” in comment lines in .tex file.)