



IN 2018, **53% OF ENGINEERING GRADUATE STUDENTS AND 66.4% OF ENGINEERING POSTDOCTORAL APPOINTEES**

WERE A TEMPORARY VISA HOLDER

Restrictions...helpful or detrimental?

June 2020

In a year of incredible uncertainty, the government has continued to implement policy that affects hiring.

The current administration is increasing restrictions on those with a work visa. In early May, a group of US Senators asked President Trump to suspend the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program. OPT allows international students in the STEM field to work in the US for up to three years post-graduation and allow employers to capitalize on fresh talent. In the last few years, we've seen more companies in the Electrical Industry refusing to hire H-1B visa holders. And H-1B visa holders reluctant to job changes and/or visa extensions being denied. With the OPT program as the probable next target, this creates an increased uncertainty of job talent availability (to fulfill the skills gap). But the Trump administration has decided to increase limits for H-1B and H-2B, plus certain H-4s, J and L visas to minimize job competition for American citizens.

On June 22, President Trump signed a proclamation titled the "Proclamation Suspending Entry of Aliens Who Present a Risk to the U.S. Labor Market Following the Coronavirus Outbreak" to combat that job competition; in hopes it will help stabilize the job market. Albeit, the OPT program remains untouched...for now. The new order will take affect beginning June 24, 2020 through December 31, 2020. And may be extended into 2021, if deemed necessary.

Although these efforts to block incoming and renewing visa holding employees are to provide American workers with more opportunity, the new policies may have an adverse effect, according to a new UCLA study. In 2018, 53% of engineering graduate students and 66.4% of engineering postdoctoral appointees were a temporary visa holder.³ And roughly 21% of the science and engineering workforce were Bachelor holding, foreign born workers (as of 2017).²

We're also noticing a resistance from companies in hiring TN visa holders. The "TN nonimmigrant classification permits qualified Canadian and Mexican citizens to seek temporary entry into the United States to engage in business activities at a professional level."¹ Though, Canadian citizens are given a more lenient option under TN-1 classifications that permits them to establish eligibility at US borders; whereas, Mexican citizens must apply for TN Visas prior to travel to the US. TN eligibility requires renewal every three years. The coronavirus pandemic has had an effect on TN visa holders and eligibility. The number of closers in application sites and efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 has slowed the application process. The US Immigration and Citizenship Services website does state that applications "premium processing would resume for Form I-129 and Form I-140 petitions in phases over the month of June."¹

As we reported last year in this newsletter, our country has to emphasize STEM learning and opportunities for our youth to close the skills gap. Southwire's 12 for Life program, recruits, trains and develops high schoolers' skills to better prepare them for the (trade and industrial) workforce after receiving their diploma. Community colleges also partner with their local high schools to encourage continued education and prep students for the next step of their careers.

We will continue to monitor visa restrictions, as the OPT program may be affected in the future.

1: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/tn-nafta-professionals>

2: <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsb20198/immigration-and-the-s-e-workforce>

3: <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/gradpostdoc/2018/html/gss18-dt-tab001-3c.html>