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Stemming the brain drain with international students

SARAH SZURPICKI | TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2012



MICHIGAN'S GLOBAL FUTURE

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With over 23,000 foreign born students, Michigan has the eighth largest foreign student population in the country. And that number is only growing (check out the recent [Free Press article](#) about the incredible increase in Chinese students at major Michigan universities over the past four years). Education is something we're currently "exporting" -- people come

to Michigan, pay for education (some \$600 million annually) and take it back to their home country or another state.

But what if, instead of exporting all that talent, we did what we could to keep foreign born students in Michigan, contributing to our economy, our culture, and our cities?

This proposition becomes even more enticing when you look at the skills of foreign born students and how closely they align with the skills required by the "new economy" -- the economy into which Michigan is struggling to transition. Particularly, foreign born students receive a disproportionate number of degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, especially at the master's and Ph.D. levels. "Foreign born graduates can help revive manufacturing -- which is a huge strength for Detroit--because they develop new companies and products," said Athena Trentin, the director of the [Global Talent Retention Initiative of Southeast Michigan \(GTRI\)](#).

GTRI, an effort launched out of Global Detroit's work last fall, housed at the [University Research Corridor](#), and funded by the [New Economy Initiative for Southeast Michigan](#), aims to find ways to keep international students in Michigan after they graduate, by connecting them to jobs and opportunities, and helping

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them feel welcome.

GTRI works with four main groups to pursue these aims: international students, seven universities in Southeast Michigan, economic development organizations, and potential employers. GTRI develops materials and events (like career conferences) that help students connect with employers. (Cultural differences create some specific challenges for international students. For instance, in many cultures, the self-promotion required during an American job interview is considered rude boasting--so those students need coaching about how to approach an interview.) On the other hand, Trentin educates employers to overcome the misunderstandings many have about the complications and costs of hiring international workers.

Trentin explains why this effort is so vital to Michigan, "We're looking at the economics here. It's about becoming globally competitive again." Our international students, and the degree to which we engage them in our economy, is an integral key to that equation. "We're working on bringing Detroit back to where it needs to be."

Athena Trentin will be speaking about the Global Talent Retention Initiative at "Stemming the Brain Drain," a Global Detroit cocktail party, on Thursday, March 29, 5-7 p.m. at TechTown. The event is free but the favor of RSVP is requested to sarah.szurpicki@gmail.com. "Stemming the Brain Drain" is sponsored by Wayne State University and GTRI.

Sarah Szurpicki works at the New Solutions Group, a Detroit-based public policy consulting firm. New Solutions serves, in addition to many other things, as the staff for Global Detroit.



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The hard truth is that less than 25% of Michigan residents have a bachelors degree or hig Engineering fields. We just DON'T have the talent in Michigan or the US to fill these jobs v advanced degrees in these fields are awarded to international students each year). If we CREATE jobs for the rest of Michigan. There are many programs in place to attract ALL qu attraction picture. Speaking as an employer, until we can get more of our kids interested ii ALL qualified individuals or I will be forced to move my company out of state and maybe e
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