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**Fwd: Latitudes: For international postdocs, the U.S. research experience might not measure up**

1 message

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To: Dale Gough <dale@foreigncredentials.org>

Wed, Aug 28, 2024 at 11:03 AM

"Nobody ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the American people." - H.L. Mencken, the Bard of Baltimore.

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From: Karin Fischer <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>  
Date: Wed, Aug 28, 2024 at 11:01 AM  
Subject: Latitudes: For international postdocs, the U.S. research experience might not measure up  
To: <amadorsapo@gmail.com>

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# Latitudes

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## New study looks at the experience of foreign postdocs and finds it lacking

International postdoctoral scholars often earn less than their American counterparts and report having fewer opportunities to teach or be a co-investigator on research grants, especially if they earned their Ph.D.s. abroad.

A [new paper](#) by Shulamit Kahn and Megan MacGarvie, both associate professors of markets, public policy, and law at Boston University,

suggests that foreign postdocs have a different experience than do American scholars — one that can be subpar.

The findings are significant because more than half of all postdoctoral scholars are temporary residents, and of those, 70 percent received their doctorates outside the United States. Some 85 percent of American scientific papers are estimated to have at least one postdoc as part of the authorship team.

At the same time, academic-laboratory directors in both the United States and Europe have reported a shortage of postdocs, as more young scientists go directly into the private sector after earning their degrees. The number of international scholars coming for fellowships at American colleges has also not fully recovered after dropping precipitously during the pandemic.

Despite their critical role in science and academe, research on this group has been limited, Kahn and MacGarvie write. They mined the Early Career Doctoral Survey, conducted by the National Science Foundation, to try to paint a fuller and comparative picture.

Foreign-educated postdocs, they found, earn less than international scholars who studied in the United States — who make less than do American citizens and permanent residents. American postdoctoral fellows are paid about 7 percent more than their overseas-trained counterparts and 5 percent more than those who received their schooling in this country.

This disparity exists despite the fact that temporary residents are more likely to work in higher-paid fields, such as engineering and computer science. What's more, postdocs with foreign degrees have higher research productivity: They produce 19 percent more published articles, make 17 percent more submissions, and have 34 percent more published proceedings than American citizens.

MacGarvie and Kahn also examined several other aspects of the postdoctoral experience, including grant and teaching involvement, mentoring and career guidance, publication support, and collaboration with researchers outside their department or lab. On only one dimension, appropriate recognition for their work, did American and non-American scholars not report significantly different experiences. In general, the negative gaps were wider for those educated abroad.

While the researchers do not claim to estimate causal effects, one reason for the differences in salary and experience may be that

international postdocs have less bargaining power than those educated in the United States. Degree holders from American institutions, including those on student visas, often have more extensive and established networks in this country, which can result in better matches in lab placements and more fellowship offers.

At the same time, international postdocs may have more to gain: Knowledge of the American research system has value, and connections with American scientists can increase scholars' chances of getting a permanent job in the United States as well as expand opportunities for overseas collaboration if they return home.

Noncitizens are also less likely to have their own research funding, mainly because of restrictions on U.S.-government grants. A third of the American postdocs MacGarvie and Kahn studied were either on federally funded fellowships or had other sources of federal funds awarded directly to them, rather than to their supervisor or institution. Less than 8 percent of American-educated temporary visa holders, and less than 14 percent of those who got their degrees abroad, have their own funding.

There can be a disadvantage to not speaking English as a first language, despite the fact that many scientists in the United States are not native English speakers, the authors write. And a recent National Institutes of Health committee studying the postdoctoral experience noted that visa rules and immigration concerns can "compound" the challenges of foreign scholars.

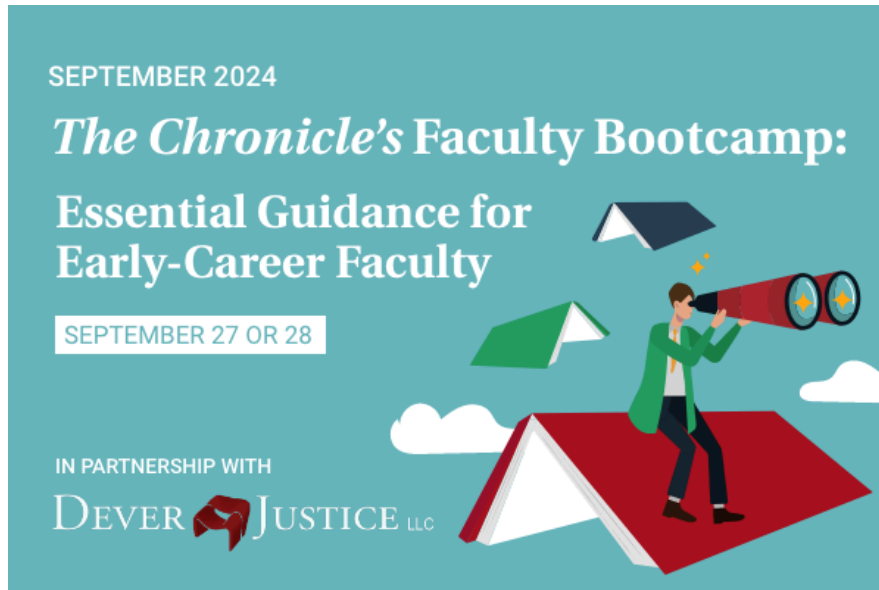
Supervisors could be hesitant to invest in temporary visa holders, but Kahn and MacGarvie discovered that better pay and more positive experiences can make postdocs who planned to leave the United States more likely to stay here.

Their findings suggest that colleges and federal science agencies could do more to attract, retain, and improve the experiences of foreign postdocs, such as expanding mentoring and helping them find placements that better match their abilities and interest.

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## Share your perspective

I'd like to hear more from current or former international postdoctoral fellows: Do the researchers' findings resonate with you? Did you discover different challenges or different opportunities? What are your suggestions for improving this early-career academic experience? Write to me at [karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto:karin.fischer@chronicle.com), and I could include your reflections in an upcoming newsletter.

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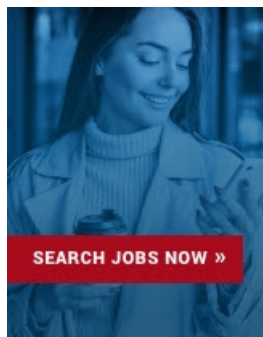
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