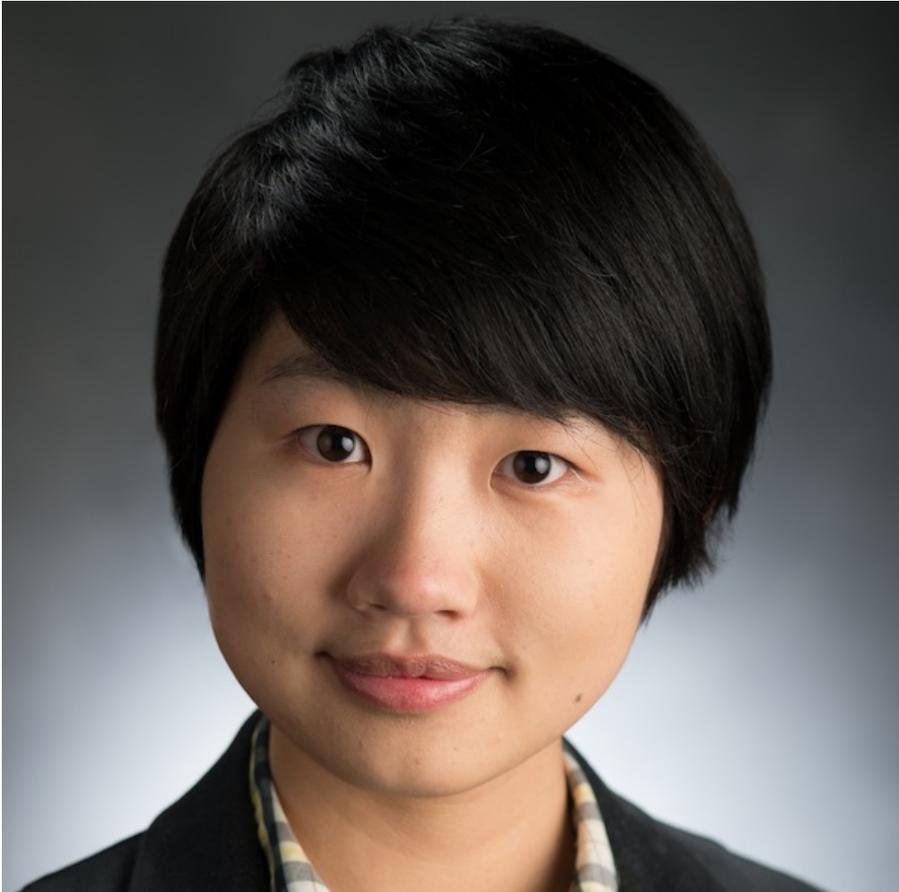


## International students at Michigan schools present opportunities for economy

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Before moving from China to become a graduate student at Michigan State University, Skyin (Xiaoyu) Yin did her research. She knew that nearby Lansing was the State Capitol. She figured out what a Spartan was. And she learned that her fellow classmates were really into football. Yet even with her preparation she felt overwhelmed.

"The cities I am familiar with are big cities and are much larger than Lansing, but the

university I attended had a small campus - very different from Michigan State. It was difficult at first," Skyin says.

The assistance of several groups catering to the needs of international students quickly helped Skyin make friends and professional connections. After graduating last spring and obtaining a student visa, she used those relationships to secure a job at [MessageMakers](#), an award-winning global event planning, video production, and instructional design company in Lansing.

Increasingly, international students like Skyin are using student visas to stay in Michigan after they graduate. Most international students are able to utilize the Optional Practical Training (OPT) portion of their student visa to remain in the United States for a year after they graduate. If the students earn a Science, Technology, Mathematics or Engineering (STEM) degree, and they work for an employer who uses the federal E-Verify system, they are eligible for a 17-month extension -- in essence allowing them to work legally in the U.S. for 29 months after graduation without having to jump through any complicated and expensive legal hoops.

This Wednesday, Oct.16, [Global Detroit](#) and the [Michigan Global Talent Retention Initiative](#) will release a report detailing where these international students are working after they graduate. Because the OPT visa is granted after the student graduates, they are free to pursue a job anywhere in the country. Surprisingly, the data shows that international students remain in Michigan at nearly the same rate as students from Michigan and three times the rate of students from out-of-state.

Skyin is just one example of the over 25,500 international students who enroll in Michigan colleges and universities each academic year. Michigan schools rank eighth nationwide in attracting international students and those students contribute an estimated \$750 million to the state's economy each year.

With such a large population of students choosing to live and study in Michigan, there is a tremendous opportunity for the state's economy to grow with the help of them.

Take students in STEM fields. By the end of this decade, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, Michigan will need to fill 274,000 STEM careers due to retiring baby boomers. Data shows that over half of the international students using the OPT visa have a STEM degree and a majority of those STEM students studied some form of engineering, a vital field for the auto industry.

Moreover, an international student is three times more likely to study a STEM field than a domestic student. International students have the potential to play a critical role filling STEM career vacancies in Michigan's future.

Or take Detroit's burgeoning tech industry. From 1995 to 2005, while immigrants made up only 5.3 percent of the Michigan population, they created 32.8 percent of all high-tech startups. The average high-tech immigrant entrepreneur started their business 13 years after entering the country and the number one reason they entered the U.S. was to get an education.

With thousands of international entrepreneurs, computer scientists and MBAs enrolled at Wayne State University, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Lawrence Tech every year, a river of talent is flowing right through Detroit's backyard.

With the right support from organizations like the Michigan Global Talent Retention Initiative that helped Skyin at MSU, these talented international students will see that Michigan is as good of a place as any to start their business, career, and family.

For Skyin, the decision to stay in Michigan after graduating was an easy one. Thanks to the organizations at Michigan State helping international students acclimate to a new country and the connections she made while in school, she was able to tap into a large network of employers to help start her own career.

But that is not the only reason she is staying. During her time here, Skyin has had the opportunity to experience a few of the "many hidden treasures" Michigan has to offer. But she is looking forward to seeing more. After a recent trip to the Sleeping Bear Dunes, she hopes her next trip will be to the Upper Peninsula.

"I came to the United States to see a different world," Skyin says. "I'm glad Michigan is what I found."

*Andrew Sokoly works at Global Detroit and co-wrote "International Talent Retention in Michigan: A Pathway to National Competitiveness" which will be released Oct. 16.*