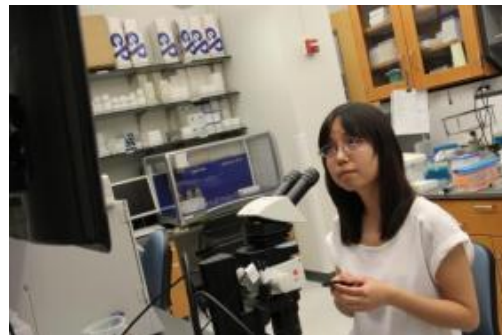


Universities Launch New Program To Help International Students Find Jobs In St. Louis

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By [TIM LLOYD](#)

Friday morning a new initiative to help international students find jobs at local companies is being unveiled. Called the International Student Global Talent Hiring Program, the effort is being spearheaded by the St. Louis Mosaic Project, an initiative to make the St. Louis region the fastest growing major metro area of foreign-born residents by 2020. The collaboration, which is being announced at the [Growing Global luncheon](#) today, will include a mentoring program and regional training initiative to help international students polish their interviewing skills. It will also offer free legal advice to local companies curious about what it takes to hire an international student.



Yinzi Liu studies zebrafish embryos in a Washington University lab. She'd like to stay in St. Louis after graduation, but is having a hard time finding an employer to sponsor her visa.

Credit Tim Lloyd / St. Louis Public Radio

Taking part in the collaborative effort are Washington University, Webster University, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville, the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Saint Louis University.

Karl Aldrich, assistant director of career services at Saint Louis University, said it will also allow universities to share best practices.

“If there’s a program that we know really works well on our campus to educate our students we share that with those other institutions and say, ‘you might want to give this a shot,’” Aldrich said.

Much of the focus will be on students with STEM degrees, which is shorthand for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Nationally, there is debate about how badly students with these degrees are needed by employers.

A [study](#) by the Economic Policy Institute found that the need for foreign-born people to

fill STEM jobs has been overstated. Others worry that pumping in foreign STEM workers will discourage American students from pursuing those careers.

In contrast, an analysis by the Brookings Institution disputed those criticisms and echoed a call by leaders in the tech industry to raise the number of H-1B visas, which are used by companies to hire international students in the STEM fields.

Christina Pope, who advises international students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, acknowledged the conflicting data on the national need for intentional students with STEM degrees. But she said there does seem to be a demand locally.

“They’re looking for students with specific skill sets and they’re having trouble filling those positions with students, whether they be domestic or international,” Pope said.

In addition, she said, the program could serve as a recruiting tool for participating schools looking to lure international students eager to work in America after they earn diplomas.

Betsy Cohen, program director for the St. Louis Mosaic Project, said helping local companies fill those positions with international students will ultimately bolster the local economy.

“The question is how do we allow that to happen,” Cohen said. “Because that’s going to help our companies thrive and create more jobs as our own companies, in our region, expand.”

She added the program dovetails with other efforts by Mosaic to position the St. Louis region to take advantage of any changes the nation’s immigration system.

“It becomes a regional competitive advantage,” Cohen said.