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A Solution Seen to ‘Brain Drain’

By [STEVE LOHR](#)

A new academic study details the benefits and the threat of a “reverse brain drain” — skilled foreign workers going back to their home countries because they cannot get visas in the United States. One of the study’s authors has a solution that is not in step with the high-tech lobby. He advocates getting rid of the H-1B visa, the temporary work permit for skilled workers.

Vivek Wadhwa, a fellow at the Harvard Law School and executive in residence at Duke, said last week that the H-1B program is “wonderful for technology companies and employers. They have a captive audience.”

The H-1B, he said, allows the sponsoring company to control employees, and often underpay them, as critics of the visa program contend.

Instead, Mr. Wadhwa said the United States should simply grant skilled immigrant workers permanent residence visas, so-called green cards. The new report says that more than one million skilled workers — scientists, engineers, doctors and researchers — are competing for 120,000 permanent residence visas each year.

The surging backlog, the study adds, results in skilled workers returning to their home countries.

The report, published last week, was conducted by researchers at Harvard, Duke and [New York University](#).

“If these people stay, we win,” Mr. Wadhwa said. “If they work with our brightest people and learn American ways and go back, we have a big problem. The risk is they leave and compete with us.”