

## Brain Waste in the Illinois Workforce: Select Labor Force Characteristics of College-Educated Native-Born and Foreign-Born Adults

Research by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) in the United States and Europe has demonstrated the challenges facing foreign-educated individuals who seek high-skilled employment that utilizes their talents and professional experience.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, these challenges include difficulties in obtaining recognition of professional experiences and credentials earned from educational institutions abroad, acquiring professional-level English skills, navigating costly or time-consuming recertification processes, and building professional networks and U.S. job search skills.

This fact sheet on Illinois is part of a series that assesses the extent of “brain waste” in the United States and twelve key states—that is, the number of college-educated immigrant<sup>2</sup> and native-born adults ages 25 and older who are either unemployed or have jobs that are significantly below their education and skill levels. The fact sheet also provides calculations of underutilization<sup>3</sup> of education among immigrant and native-born professionals in Illinois with engineering, nursing, and teaching degrees at the undergraduate level.

Among the key findings:

- 81,800, or 24 percent, of the 334,000 college-educated immigrants ages 25 and older in the civilian labor force in Illinois are affected by brain waste—e.g. are in low-skilled jobs or are unemployed, according to MPI analysis of the most recent U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data.
- Brain waste particularly affects the foreign born in Illinois who earned their bachelor’s degrees abroad, with 29 percent in low-skilled jobs or unemployed.
- 22 percent of the state’s college-educated immigrants who obtained their academic degree abroad worked in low-skilled jobs, compared to 12 percent of college-educated native-born workers.

1. See, for example: Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix with Peter A. Creticos, *Uneven Progress: The Employment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2008), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/uneven-progress-employment-pathways-skilled-immigrants-united-states](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/uneven-progress-employment-pathways-skilled-immigrants-united-states); Madeleine Sumption, *Tackling Brain Waste: Strategies to Improve the Recognition of Immigrants’ Foreign Qualifications* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013), [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/tackling-brain-waste-strategies-improve-recognition-immigrants%E2%80%99-foreign-qualifications](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/tackling-brain-waste-strategies-improve-recognition-immigrants%E2%80%99-foreign-qualifications).
2. The terms *immigrant* and *foreign born* are used interchangeably, and describe persons who had no U.S. citizenship at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), certain legal nonimmigrants (e.g., persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status, and persons illegally residing in the United States; the native born are persons born in the United States, U.S. outlying territories, or abroad to at least one U.S. citizen parent.
3. The terms *brain waste* and *skill underutilization* are used interchangeably and describe a phenomenon when college-educated persons are either unemployed or employed in *low-skilled jobs*, i.e., jobs that require only moderate on-the-job training or less, such as nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides, personal care aides, maids and housekeeping cleaners, taxi and truck drivers, and cashiers.

## I. Number and Share of College-Educated Adults in the Illinois Labor Force by Nativity and Place of Education<sup>4</sup>

More than 2 million adults ages 25 and older engaged in the Illinois civilian labor force have at least a bachelor's degree, according to the most recent American Community Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Of these adults, 334,000 are college-educated immigrants. While immigrants represent 14 percent of the overall Illinois population, they account for 16 percent of the college-educated civilian labor force.

We estimate that about 172,000 (or 52 percent) of the 334,000 college-educated immigrants obtained their education abroad, with the remaining 162,000 U.S.-educated. Each group makes up about 8 percent of the overall Illinois college-educated civilian labor force.

**Table 1. College-Educated Adults in the Illinois Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Place of Education**

	Native Born	Foreign Born		
		Total	Foreign-Educated Immigrants	U.S.-Educated Immigrants
<b>College-educated civilian labor force</b>	1,760,100	334,000	172,400	161,600
<b>Share of all immigrants by place of education</b>	-	-	52%	48%
<b>Share of the total college-educated by nativity</b>	84%	16%	8%	8%

Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2010-12 American Community Survey (ACS) data.

4. *College-educated civilian labor force*: defined as civilian adults ages 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree who were either employed or unemployed but looking for work. Civilian labor force excludes members of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marines); *Place of education*: The ACS survey does not ask for respondents' place of education. We use the following definitions: *foreign-educated immigrants* are immigrants who have at least a bachelor's degree and who arrived to the United States at the age 25 or older; *U.S.-educated immigrants* are immigrants with at least a BA and who arrived to the United States before age 25.

## II. College-Educated Native-Born and Foreign-Born Adults in Illinois by Job Skill and Place of Education with Number and Share Affected by Brain Waste

Among both native-born and foreign-born college-educated adults in Illinois, a majority of individuals are employed in high-skilled positions. Slightly over 1 million (58 percent) of native-born workers in the state are employed in high-skilled positions compared to 219,000 (12 percent) employed in low-skilled positions. Among the foreign born, a smaller share—53 percent or slightly more than 176,000—is employed in high-skilled jobs versus almost 62,000 (18 percent) in low-skilled jobs. Among college-educated immigrants, those educated in the United States are more likely to be employed in high-skilled jobs than those with foreign credentials (56 percent versus 50 percent). The greatest disparity exists between foreign-educated immigrants and their native-born and U.S.-educated counterparts: 22 percent of foreign-educated college graduates who are immigrants are employed in low-skilled jobs versus 12 percent and 14 percent of their U.S.-educated counterparts (native born and foreign born respectively).

Comparing college-educated native- and foreign-born individuals who are either employed in low-skilled jobs or unemployed, one finds that immigrants are also more generally affected by brain waste, with 24 percent in low-skilled jobs or unemployed compared to 17 percent of the native born. Among the foreign-born labor force, those educated abroad are again more likely to be affected by brain waste, with 29 percent in low-skilled jobs or unemployed compared to 17 percent of native-born college-educated adults and 20 percent of U.S.-educated immigrants.

**Table 2. College-Educated Native-Born and Foreign-Born Adults in Illinois, by Job Skill and Place of Education with Number and Share Affected by Brain Waste**

	Native Born	Foreign Born		
		Total	Foreign-Educated Immigrants	U.S.-Educated Immigrants
<b>College-educated labor force</b>	1,760,100	334,000	172,400	161,600
	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Employed workers by job skill</b>				
<b>High-skilled</b>	1,028,600	176,200	86,200	90,100
<i>Share high-skilled</i>	58%	53%	50%	56%
<b>Middle-skilled</b>	425,600	76,000	36,700	39,300
<i>Share middle-skilled</i>	24%	23%	21%	24%
<b>Low-skilled</b>	219,300	61,600	38,300	23,300
<i>Share low-skilled</i>	12%	18%	22%	14%
<b>Unemployed</b>	86,600	20,200	11,300	8,900
<i>Share unemployed</i>	5%	6%	7%	6%
<b>Affected by brain waste</b>				
<b>Number (i.e., in low-skilled jobs or unemployed)</b>	305,900	81,800	49,600	32,200
<b>Share</b>	17%	24%	29%	20%

*Notes:* High-skilled jobs require at least a four-year bachelor's degree plus a substantial amount of work-related skills, knowledge, or experience; Middle-skilled jobs typically require that workers have trained in vocational schools, have related on-the-job experience, or hold an associate's degree; Low-skilled jobs require only moderate on-the-job training or less. Unemployed refers to those adults who do not have a job but are looking for work.

*Source:* MPI tabulation of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2010-12 ACS data.

### III. Number and Share of Immigrants in Illinois with Engineering, Nursing, or Teaching Degrees Earned at the Undergraduate Level

Immigrants account for 16 percent of the Illinois college-educated labor force, but they are overrepresented among workers with both engineering and nursing bachelor’s degrees. Of the roughly 184,000 college-educated individuals who earned a bachelor’s degree in engineering, about 66,000 or 36 percent are foreign born; among the 82,000 with undergraduate degrees in nursing, almost 19,000 (23 percent) are foreign born. However, immigrants are significantly underrepresented among those with teaching degrees—accounting for about 23,000 or 9 percent of individuals in the workforce with a bachelor’s degree focused on teaching.

**Table 3. Number and Share of Immigrants in Illinois with Undergraduate Engineering, Nursing, or Teaching Degrees**

	Total College-Educated Labor Force	Foreign Born	Foreign-Born Share (%)
Persons with engineering major **	183,500	65,900	36%
Persons with nursing major ***	82,000	18,900	23%
Persons with teaching major ****	261,600	22,800	9%

*Notes:* The ACS requests degree major information only at the bachelor’s level. If a respondent earned a master’s degree the subject area would not be reflected in the data; if a respondent earned two bachelor’s degrees, each would be counted separately.

\*\* Engineering or engineering technologies was indicated as the degree of field at the bachelor of arts (BA) or the bachelor of science (BS) level; \*\*\* Nursing was indicated as the degree of field at the BA/BS level; \*\*\*\* Education was indicated as the degree of field at the BA/BS level (e.g., general, elementary, early childhood, secondary teacher, or special needs education, mathematics, science, and computer teacher education, art and music education).

*Source:* MPI tabulation of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2010-12 ACS data.

### IV. Adults in Illinois Who Earned Bachelor’s Degrees in Engineering, Nursing, or Teaching by Job Skill, Nativity, and Place of Education for Foreign Born

*Engineering/engineering technology major college graduates.* Though the majority of individuals with engineering degrees at the undergraduate level in Illinois tend to be employed in high-skilled positions, significant disparities exist among native-born and foreign-born college graduates, especially for engineers who were educated abroad. Foreign-educated immigrant engineers are almost twice as likely to be employed in a low-skilled job (15 percent) as their native-born counterparts (7 percent); while 71 percent of U.S.-trained immigrant engineers are employed in high-skilled positions, only 64 percent of those educated abroad are.

*Nursing major college graduates.* Foreign -educated immigrants with a bachelor’s degree in nursing are more than twice as likely to have a low-skilled job (10 percent) than their U.S.-born counterparts (4 percent), and only 17 percent work in high-skilled positions (compared to 23 percent of native-born college-graduates with a nursing degree).

*Teaching major college graduates.* Data on the underemployment of foreign-educated teachers show the greatest disparities of all three fields. More than one-third of foreign-educated immigrant teachers (37 percent) have low-skilled jobs, making them more than three times as likely as U.S.-born teachers to be employed in low-skilled jobs. And while 70 percent of U.S.-born individuals with teaching degrees are employed in high-skilled jobs, only 34 percent of foreign-educated immigrants with a teaching degree and 60 percent of those educated in the United States hold high-skilled positions.

**Table 4. Adults in Illinois with Bachelor’s Degrees in Engineering, Nursing, or Teaching by Job Skill, Nativity, and Place of Education for Foreign Born**

	Native Born	Foreign-Educated Immigrants	U.S.-Educated Immigrants
<b>Persons with engineering major at the BA/BS level**</b>	117,600	37,400	28,500
<b>High-skilled</b>	69%	64%	71%
<b>Middle-skilled</b>	20%	16%	16%
<b>Low-skilled</b>	7%	15%	7%
<b>Unemployed</b>	5%	5%	5%
<b>Persons with nursing major at the BA/BS level***</b>	63,100	10,300	8,600
<b>High-skilled</b>	23%	17%	9%
<b>Middle-skilled</b>	70%	72%	78%
<b>Low-skilled</b>	4%	10%	8%
<b>Unemployed</b>	3%	2%	5%
<b>Persons with teaching major at the BA/BS level****</b>	238,800	13,000	9,800
<b>High-skilled</b>	70%	34%	60%
<b>Middle-skilled</b>	16%	24%	13%
<b>Low-skilled</b>	10%	37%	21%
<b>Unemployed</b>	3%	5%	4%

*Notes:* The ACS requests degree major information only at the bachelor’s level. If a respondent earned a master’s degree the subject area would not be reflected; if a respondent earned two bachelor’s degrees each would be counted separately.

\*\* Engineering or engineering technologies was indicated as the degree of field at the bachelor’s level; \*\*\* Nursing was indicated as the degree of field at the bachelor’s level; \*\*\*\* Education was indicated as the degree of field at the bachelor’s level (e.g., general, elementary, early childhood, secondary teacher, or special needs education, mathematics, science, and computer teacher education, art and music education).

*Source:* MPI tabulation of U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2010-12 American Community Survey data.

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This Fact Sheet was written by Jeanne Batalova, Margie McHugh, and Madeleine Morawski as part of a series on brain waste among high-skilled immigrants and refugees in the fields of engineering, nursing, and teaching. It is a project of the Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy and was produced with support from the J.M. Kaplan Fund. Additional fact sheets in this series and other MPI research on this topic can be found at [www.migrationpolicy.org/topics/brain-waste-credential-recognition](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/topics/brain-waste-credential-recognition).

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Suggested citation: Batalova, Jeanne, Margie McHugh, and Madeleine Morawski. 2014. Brain Waste in the Illinois Workforce: Select Labor Force Characteristics of College-Educated Native-Born and Foreign-Born Adults. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.