



## Duo Security and GTRI Partner on International STEM Talent Event

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Dozens of international students finishing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields were on hand at **Duo Security's** Ann Arbor, MI, office last week for a tech talent matchmaking event sponsored by the **Michigan Global Talent Retention Initiative**(GTRI) and **Global Detroit**. The event was the first in a series designed to connect fast-growing tech companies with the crop of international STEM students preparing to graduate from Michigan universities.

The idea of retaining international talent isn't new. **Proponents, including Gov. Rick Snyder, say Michigan could bolster its economy** and fill the technical talent void by encouraging foreign STEM students to stay in the Great Lakes State after they graduate.

"We're seeking people with a wide variety of experiences and perspectives to help us problem-solve creatively," said **Xconomist Dug Song**, co-founder and CEO of **Duo Security, a computer security startup that is one of the fastest-growing companies in Michigan**. "We're trying to disrupt a stagnant industry and build the right kind of organization."

Gracie Xavier, Global Detroit's director of corporate engagement and strategy, said she first became acquainted with Song at **the unconference Xconomy hosted last December**. Xavier and Song were part of a discussion group exploring the current shortage of qualified candidates to fill all the tech jobs available in Southeast Michigan. It's an ongoing problem that a few different **startups** and **government programs** have tried to crack, mostly through coding classes.

"Sixty percent of STEM talent coming out of our universities is international students," Xavier said. "If we don't tap that talent, these students will leave and go somewhere else."

According to data supplied by Global Detroit, Michigan ranks ninth in the nation in terms of the number of international students attending college here. Michigan State University has the most foreign-born students, followed by University of Michigan, Wayne State University, Western Michigan University, and Michigan Technological University. Sixty-seven percent of the more than 5,500 international students working in the U.S. after

graduating from GTRI-participating universities have obtained STEM degrees and 82 percent have obtained graduate degrees. Xavier said those numbers reinforce the idea that Michigan has a steady supply of one of the world's most important economic resources: STEM workers with graduate degrees.

Song recalled that when he worked for Barracuda Networks, another Ann Arbor-based computer security company, the talent needs were so great that executives would charter a plane to the Upper Peninsula so they could recruit Michigan Tech students. While Michigan Tech is a fine school and a great place to find tech workers, he said tech companies like Duo need to also explore avenues off the beaten path.

"We're trying to make sure we show up places where the best talent is—not just the obvious places," Song explained. "We're also looking to support programs like GTRI. It kills me when people say there isn't any tech talent in Michigan. We've hired more than 70 engineers just in Ann Arbor, and per capita, Michigan has more engineers than anywhere outside of Silicon Valley. We have to cultivate a community where we're all helping each other improve the situation for everybody."

Xavier said the international students who visited Duo as part of the GTRI event were impressed with Song and his dedication to a comprehensive talent strategy. "To have a CEO be so approachable and saying he's open to diverse talent—the students really appreciated that," she said.

Song also told the students about his personal experiences as the child of immigrant parents. "My parents were born in Korea, came here to go to college, and ended up staying," he said. "All of us here in the U.S. are immigrants, just about. Michigan has a long tradition of successive waves of immigrants driving innovation and growth."

But mostly, Song said, luring and cultivating international talent makes economic sense. "Any growing company with the wherewithal to [host a GTRI event] should do it, because a rising tide lifts all boats," he said. "We have to do our part to make sure Michigan is fertile ground for growing companies. New York is about money, L.A. is about fame, D.C. is about power, San Francisco is about disruption, and Ann Arbor is about learning and smarts. We do an amazing job of attracting the world's top talent here, and hiring international talent is one of those things we should be strategic about supporting."

On April 7, GTRI will host a job fair for international STEM students at Henry Ford College in Dearborn, MI, and Xavier said her organization hopes to connect with more local tech companies struggling to meet their talent needs. "We hope employers will consider us to be a partner in finding talent," she added.