

The Demand-Side of the H-1B Visa Process: Examining Firm Behavior

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In-person Event Only | ERC Conference Room 115



Presenter: Kevin Shih, PhD

Kevin Shih is an Assistant Professor of Economics at Queens College, City University of New York. He is a labor economist who specializes in the economics of immigration. His work has been published in academic journals, such as the Journal of Labor Economics and AEJ: Economic Policy, and received coverage by media outlets, such as the Wall Street Journal, the Atlantic, and Vox EU. He received his Ph.D. from UC Davis in 2015.

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The H-1B visa is the primary pathway for skilled foreign nationals to enter the U.S. workforce. For nearly the past decade, private sector employers wishing to hire H-1B workers have done so through a lottery system where the annual quota of 65,000 visas are randomly distributed amongst applicants each year. While employers play a key role in the selection and sponsorship of H-1B workers, little is known about their participation and behavior in this application process. Using administrative data on H-1B applicants, we elucidate the characteristics of participating firms and analyze their application behavior. To do so we develop a method to impute unobservable applications that were never recorded as adjudicators did not process non-selected petitions during lottery years. We then provide a preliminary assessment of how H-1B visas affect firm performance.

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