

# Foreign research associates mired in bureaucracy

Michelle Walbaum / University Editor

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Research Associate Anna Gubskaya feels stuck.

Gubskaya is a foreign national - someone from another country, who wants to do original research at the University. But without a green card, that is proving to be difficult.

To do original research, she said she should receive grants like most other researchers, and in order to receive grants, she must have a green card.

"The absence of this green card [means I] can't establish myself professionally here," Gubskaya said, who works in the Life Sciences Building on Busch campus.

Having racked up two doctorates and two master degrees over a period of 10 years - a doctorate in physics and mathematics and a master's in biophysics and chemistry - she said she came to the United States because the country holds the most promising research opportunities in her field of biotechnology.

Ukraine offers no comparison. She said the country is unstable, lasting through several revolutions. Science there, she said, is not exactly on the top of the list of things to do.

"Science will come in 50 years, 100 years, now it's not a priority for the Ukraine," she said. "Ukraine scientists are all over the world right now."

Coming on a temporary visa, foreign nationals can't apply for most federal grants to fund their own original research, said Massimilio Cristofanilli, a research associate from Italy working at the Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience on Busch campus.

Without a grant to do research, getting a green card is very hard - a catch 22. Green card applications require doctorate scientists to have a formidable resume, Massimilio said.

"Most federal funding places, the National Institute of Health for instance -

you can not apply for a grant if you do not have a green card. These are major, major problem[s] for foreigners at Rutgers. This is why foreigners don't even try to apply for National Institute of Health - they can't," Cristofanilli said.

An alternative, and perhaps easier way for foreign nationals to receive a green card is by presenting a sponsorship from his or her employer, Cristofanilli said.

"You have this strong recommendation letter, you have this sponsorship from the university," Cristofanilli said. "So they say 'O.K., the university thinks this guy is very good, even though he didn't prove it yet, but he has the potential to do it.'"

But the lack of University sponsorship is not the result of Rutgers-only policies, said Marcy Cohen, the director for international student and faculty services.

Not supporting those with temporary positions is a federal decision.

"Federal regulations require employers to have permanent or tenure-track job offers for employees whom they sponsor for permanent resident visas," she said, adding the University supports foreign nationals who come to fill tenure-track jobs, since they are permanent employees.

But even for foreign nationals fortunate enough to come to the University with a tenure track position, earning a green card is still not an easy task.

The amount of work needed for just tenure track foreigners takes a toll on the staff at the International Student and Faculty Services.

"It's a very, very complicated, extremely labor intensive matter to do each individual green card we do," Cohen said.

To sponsor the green card applications of non-tenure track faculty would mean an additional large workload, and additional employees.

"Rutgers would basically have to give us ten more people on staff," she said. "Even if Rutgers turned all their post-doctoral positions permanent, there is no way we're staffed to do that."

Cohen said there were 314 research associates working at the University right now.

So non-tenure track foreign nationals cannot expect to receive sponsorships from the University to get their green cards. But getting a green card without sponsorship is time consuming and expensive as well, and instead of sitting on the desk at international services, the burden sits on the shoulders of the

one researcher.

Building an application for a green card has the potential to drain one's bank.

Yuefeng Tang, a post-doctorate from China is now working at the University and collecting her case to sponsor herself. In order for her to make her case, Tang must hire a lawyer to represent her, and even cheap lawyers sell their services for \$3,000, she said.

Tang said she is worried her case will not hold up.

Although she has some publications, she fears it is not nearly enough. A higher end lawyer might be able to help influence a decision in her favor, but a good lawyer could cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$7,000, she said.

Getting an attorney to help build a case for permanent residency costs several thousand dollars, not to mention the price tag of green card paperwork, running into hundreds of dollars at a time, Tang said.

Getting a good lawyer demands a price Gubskaya said she can't afford. With an associate salary, which ranges between \$30,000 and \$40,000, she put her daughter through college in the Ukraine.

She also sends money to her mother, who receives a very small retirement pension.

"It is a notable amount for anyone who is on an academic salary, but for myself it is simply impossible," she said. "I do not think that my situation is unique in [the] financial sense. Many non-tenure researchers have families here with young children and their financial means [could] be even worse than mine."

Gubskaya said she fears establishing herself in the U.S. seems to be a lost cause.

Like other research associates at the University, she is further hindered by her temporary J1 visas, which restricts her professional work through travel paperwork hassles.

Gubskaya said the J1 visa prohibits travel outside of the United States, and so international conferences are, for the most part, out of the question.

Extensive paperwork and tedious rules produce roadblocks for those with temporary visas when they fly out of the country.

This interfered with my job activities," she said.

In order to get a visa to go anywhere else, Gubskaya has to go back to

Ukraine or Canada, where she has permanent residency, for at least two weeks to get a visa from the nearest U.S. embassy.

"This costs a lot of money and takes time. And I say to myself - [it is] better to give up on my professional growth than to subject myself to such troubles."

She has attended five conferences in the US and Canada.

Going back to Ukraine is not an option Gubskaya would like to pursue. Instead, she said she is going to go to Canada after leaving the United States, a country where she gained permanent residence because she stayed there for six years as a graduate student and then as a postdoctoral fellow.

Her immigration situation leaves her with only two options: To find a position in the U.S. outside of the University, where the permanent residence application in the U.S. will be supported, or to go back in Canada, to pursue a professorship there, finding grants to finance her own research. Unfortunately, Gubskaya said, in North America, financing opportunities are mostly for researchers who are permanent residents or citizens.

"Even from the very common point of view, if the society wants a professional individual to be productive and to fully contribute to its prosperity, this individual should be supported by the society at least on an essential level," she said through e-mail correspondence. "I, personally, stay optimistic and sincerely hope to find such a place."

As of 2006, the University Senate passed a bill to allow multi-year appointments for research annuals and other non-tenured faculty. Also, a four-year ceiling was cracked open, allowing for the possibility of appointments longer than four years.

Senator Ryan Cooke said this might help more non-tenured faculty reach a permanent position. Also, it gives the associates more time to show their bosses they are valuable employees. This could lead to the associate being considered for a permanent position.

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