

## STUDENTS

# Where Will the Government Look for Thousands of New Border Agents? On College Campuses

By Alex Arriaga | MARCH 17, 2017

HYATTSVILLE, MD.

At a University of Maryland University College career fair last week, the scene was familiar: Students and recent alumni of the flagship's online college, dressed in their professional best with blazers, name tags, and business cards, lingered before tables of recruiters, who gave out free merchandise and spoke of job opportunities.

The longest line of job seekers was at the U.S. State Department's table — ironic, since hiring at the department is still stalled under a partial freeze signed by President Trump.

Right across from that table, only a handful of prospective hires waited to speak with representatives of an agency with sunnier employment prospects — U.S. Customs and Border Protection. In a corner, next to a table for the Washington Nationals, a border-patrol agent and a CBP officer, whose job is to maintain security at ports of entry, stood dressed in full uniform, ready to recruit.

President Trump campaigned on a promise to tighten up border security, and that includes providing more bodies. The Department of Homeland Security has already been recruiting for the 5,000 new border-protection agents and 10,000 immigration officers President Trump requested to fulfill his plans.

The last time Homeland Security had a large surge in hiring, Terry Bennett joined the team. In 2009 a friend of his informed him of job openings with Customs and Border Protection, he said, and after a six-month application process and a four-month training academy, he became an officer.



Chronicle Photo by Alex Arriaga

Terry Bennett (left), an officer with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, at a U. of Maryland career fair: "I think that our agency right now is probably the best chance for people to get a job in this room."

Mr. Bennett spent his day at the Maryland career fair to recruit for the new push in border-patrol hiring. "I think that our agency right now is probably the best chance for people to get a job in this room," Mr. Bennett said.

Todd Gayle, a supervisory air-interdiction agent with the agency, works for its national frontline recruitment command, in Washington, D.C. Last year the agency conducted more than 1,000 recruitment events at colleges and universities, he said, and is on track to reach at least the same number this year.

A pamphlet given out to interested job applicants said Customs and Border Protection is one of the world's largest law-enforcement agencies, with almost 60,000 employees. The agency listed several open positions in Arizona and New Mexico with salaries that ranged from \$30,000 to \$50,000. Typically, the agency recruits from colleges that have degree programs in law enforcement, criminal justice, and forensics.

Mr. Bennett said that the job is an exciting opportunity for anyone who wants to work outdoors, but that getting hired can be an "arduous process." Hiring can take up to a year and a half, and includes examinations, medical screening, and physical-fitness requirements. A background check and polygraph exam have been part of the vetting process since Congress passed an anticorruption bill to prevent the possibility that agents could be blackmailed or bribed. Some Trump-administration officials want to see the process streamlined to make hiring faster.

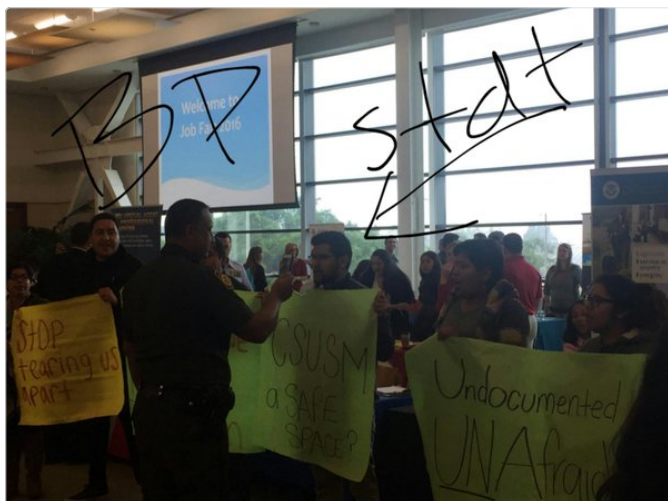
### **'A Hot Topic'**

Mr. Bennett said some of the interest at the table resulted from the push for border security during the election. "It's a hot topic right now, immigration," he said.

But border-patrol agents are not always welcome at the colleges they visit. Students at San Diego City College, the University of California campuses at Irvine and at Santa Barbara, and the University of New Mexico have protested border-patrol visits at career fairs, citing a hostile environment for undocumented students when the officers are present.

At a MiraCosta College career fair last spring, students performed a re-enactment of the fatal beating of Anastasio Hernandez-Rojas by agents in 2010. Student activists on the Irvine campus got more than 600 signatures on a petition to keep CPB out of the campus career fair in 2015, and the agency decided not to attend, citing safety concerns.

At California State University at San Marcos, a sociology professor defended student protesters who she felt were being intimidated by Border Protection representatives at a career fair last spring. Marisol Clark-Ibáñez tweeted a photo showing the officer in uniform, recording with his phone the students holding signs with the messages "CSUSM a safe space?" and "stop tearing us apart."



Marisol Clark-Ibáñez

@MCicsusm

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Students protesting border patrol at career fair - BP filming and taking fotos of students. #justwrong #csusm

4:25 PM - 7 Apr 2016

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## Differing Opinions

"These are recruitment events, not enforcement events," Roland Filiault, a spokesman for the agency, said in an email. "CBP does not question students as to their immigration status when recruiting on campus."

And over all, the protests are few and far between, Mr. Gayle said. "Officers handle that on a case-by-case basis, but nothing significant to rise to the point where we need to change our tactics in how we conduct our business. What I've been cautioning and advising our officers to do is just to maintain their situational awareness. You've seen on the news ... these protests spontaneously occur at various locations, including college campuses."

Mr. Bennett said he had never experienced a student protest at any of his career-fair visits, but has heard about them happening. While students did not protest the presence of border-patrol agents at the Maryland career fair, some skipped the table.

Michael Nagrampa, a student in IT security, said he thought it didn't make sense for the border patrol to show up at an institution as diverse as UMUC, and was not surprised that the line was far shorter than, say, the State Department's. He's a first-generation American, and his parents came to the United States from the Philippines.

"There's so much border protection on the Mexican border, I don't understand why we would need further," Mr. Nagrampa said. "I think it's just counterintuitive to what we as the United States, I thought, believed in."

The surge in hiring was exciting for some who were lined up at the CBP table. Jana Carter graduated last year with a master's degree in project management, and thinks the agency will be the place for new opportunities. "I think for me it's not so much about keeping

people out; it's about protecting the people that are already here," Ms. Carter said.

Still, she feels the tension surrounding the issue, especially after President Trump's election. Her daughter, a sophomore at George Mason University, has differing opinions about the agency's growth.

"She's about, 'Take everybody, let everybody come here,' and I'm more of a conservative mind-set, that you have to be strategic," Ms. Carter said. If she were to join the agency, she said, she and her daughter "would probably have a lot of conversations about it."

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