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Contents

- ▶ [Breaking News](#)
- ▶ [Nation/World - Front Section](#)
- ▶ [Metro](#)
- ▶ [Sports](#)
- ▶ [MoneySense](#)
 - [Doug Stanley](#)
- ▶ [Baylife](#)
- ▶ [Friday Extra](#)
- ▶ [Opinion](#)
- ▶ [Births](#)
- ▶ [Obituaries](#)
- ▶ [Classified](#)
- ▶ [Recent Editions](#)
- ▶ [Archive](#)
- ▶ [Contact Us](#)
- ▶ [The Tampa Tribune Home Page](#)

Communities

- [Pasco County](#)
- [Northeast Tampa](#)
- [N.W. Hillsborough](#)
- [South Tampa](#)
- [Central Tampa](#)
- [Brandon](#)
- [Plant City](#)
- [Pinellas County](#)
- [Hernando County](#)
- [Highlands County](#)
- ▶ [Community News Main Page](#)

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- ▶ [Weather](#)
- ▶ [Things to Do](#)
- ▶ [Sports](#)
- ▶ [Traffic](#)
- ▶ [Classified](#)
- ▶ [Real Estate](#)

Offshoring's Impact Has Been Mild On Bay Area

By **MICHAEL SASSO** msasso@tampatrib.com

Published: Oct 26, 2004

TAMPA - The moving of jobs to foreign countries probably accounts for less than 2.5 percent of all job layoffs in the Tampa Bay region, a researcher for the University of South Florida reported Monday.

Overall, this "offshoring" of jobs has had a relatively small impact on the region's labor market, said Guy Hagen, a private researcher hired by the USF Globalization Research Center to study of offshoring and offshore outsourcing. However, Hagen noted that offshoring is a growing trend in the area and that even small start-up companies are beginning to use foreign labor.

USF's globalization center recently completed a three-month study of the impact of offshoring on the local economy. It presented its findings Monday in downtown Tampa. Offshoring refers to the use of foreign labor by American companies; in some cases the company employs the workers itself in overseas factories, in other cases it outsources the work to a third-party company overseas.

Hagen acknowledged that the survey of companies was hampered by a lower response rate. While the globalization center sought insight from 1,000 local companies, only 63 responded. As such, the survey's margin of error is high, plus or minus 13 percent, he said.

While offshoring may be a minor factor in the local labor market at the moment, Hagen said it appears to be growing in significance. Some start-up companies in the Tampa Bay area are hiring computer programmers or other employees in developing nations from the day they open for business, instead of hiring local employees. These cases are not captured in U.S. layoff statistics, because the jobs were never in the United States, Hagen said.

USF commissioned its study in late spring, when offshoring was making headlines locally and nationwide. Among other cases, Capital One announced in July that it was closing its Tampa call center and eliminating 1,100 local jobs. The company never explained the layoffs, but a state senator and other local leaders speculated the jobs are moving to cheaper sources of labor, such as India or the Philippines.



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- ▶ Money
- ▶ Travel
- ▶ Games
- ▶ TBO.com Home Page

While presidential candidate John Kerry has made outsourcing a campaign theme, the issue no longer is a ``front burner issue" because of the heated debate over national security, said U.S. Rep. Jim Davis, D-Tampa, who attended the study presentation Monday. However, ``This will be a front-burner issue for the next Congress," Davis said.

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