

PRESS RELEASE

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Graduate Schools See Growth in Applications and Degrees, But Enroll Fewer New Students in 2011

Washington, DC — The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) reported today that U.S. graduate schools saw a 1.7% dip in enrollments of first-time graduate students between fall 2010 and fall 2011, marking the second consecutive year of slight decreases. Across the board, graduate school enrollments remain ahead of where they were a decade ago, but the latest figures reverse increases for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years, when enrollments grew 4.5% and 5.5% respectively. These findings are the result of the CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees, an annual survey that has been conducted since 1986.

First-time enrollment in master's and certificate-level programs declined 2.1% between fall 2010 and fall 2011, while doctoral degree programs enrolled 0.5% more new students during the same time period. Overall, according to survey respondents, more than 441,000 students began graduate studies in fall 2011.

The study also highlights an apparent gap between the aspirations of prospective graduate students and the realities of graduate enrollment: despite the overall decline in first-time enrollments, interest in pursuing graduate degrees remains high and continues to grow. The report showed a 4.3% bump in applications for admission to graduate programs between fall 2010 and fall 2011. Institutions that participated in the annual survey reported receiving nearly 1.88 million applications across all fields of study leading to master's or doctoral degrees and graduate certificates. Engineering, business, and social and behavioral sciences accounted for the largest numbers of graduate applications in 2011.

CGS President Debra Stewart observed that the gap between growing applications and dropping enrollments should be seen as a call to action. "Graduate education is a cornerstone of a thriving, highly-skilled workforce, and a graduate degree holds out lifetime benefits for individual students. The 4.3 percent increase in application numbers reveals that students are eager to attend graduate school. While the 1.7 percent decrease in first-time enrollment is not dramatic, the fact that we are now in the second year of reversed growth is a sign that we must respond with strong investments in graduate programs and student funding."

The report presents statistics on graduate applications and enrollment for fall 2011, degrees conferred in 2010-11, and trend data for one-, five- and ten-year periods. Data are disaggregated for a number of student demographic and institutional characteristics. Other findings include:

First-time graduate enrollment

- More than 441,000 students enrolled for the first time in graduate certificate, education specialist, master's, or doctoral programs for the fall term in 2011 at the institutions responding to the survey.
- Among survey respondents, over 62% of first-time graduate students were enrolled at public institutions.

- About 58% of all first-time graduate students in fall 2011 were women, according to survey respondents.
- First-time graduate enrollment of temporary residents increased 7.8% between fall 2010 and fall 2011, according to survey respondents, up from the 4.7% increase in fall 2010. In contrast, survey respondents reported that first-time graduate enrollment fell 2.3% for U.S. citizens and permanent residents between 2010 and 2011, following a 1.2% decrease the previous year.

Total graduate enrollment

- There were about 1.73 million students enrolled in graduate programs in fall 2011 at the responding institutions.
- Among institutions responding to the survey, more than half of all graduate students in fall 2011 were enrolled in programs in education, business, or health sciences.
- About 75% of all graduate students in fall 2011 were enrolled in programs leading to a master's degree or a graduate certificate, according to survey respondents.
- About 56% of all graduate students enrolled full-time at institutions responding to the survey in fall 2011 were women.
- Among survey respondents, total graduate enrollment fell 6.0% for American Indians/Alaskan Natives and 1.5% for Whites between fall 2010 and fall 2011. Over the same period other groups saw gains: Hispanic/Latinos (4.0%), Blacks/African Americans (2.9%), and Asians/Pacific Islander (1.3%).
- Total graduate enrollment at institutions responding to the survey decreased in education and in arts and humanities between fall 2010 and fall 2011.
- Between fall 2010 and fall 2011, total enrollment increased by 2.1% at the doctoral level, but decreased by 1.8% at the master's degree and graduate certificate level, according to institutions responding to the survey.

Graduate degrees and certificates awarded

- Responding institutions awarded approximately 62,900 doctoral degrees, 517,000 master's degrees, and 25,200 graduate certificates in 2010-11.
- About 40% of all doctoral degrees awarded in 2010-11 were in health sciences, engineering, and social and behavioral sciences while about 50% of all master's degrees were awarded in education and business, according to institutions responding to the survey.
- According to survey respondents, women earned two-thirds of the graduate certificates, 60% of the master's degrees, and 53% of the doctorates.
- Academic year 2010-11 marked the third straight year women earned a majority of doctoral degrees.

[Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2001 to 2011](#) presents the findings of an annual survey of U.S. graduate schools, co-sponsored by CGS and the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) Board. It is the only annual national survey that covers enrollment in all fields of graduate study and is the only source of national data on graduate applications. The report includes responses from 655 institutions, which collectively confer about 81% of the master's degrees and 92% of the doctorates awarded each year.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of over 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Among U.S. institutions, CGS members award 92% of the doctoral degrees and 81% of the master's degrees. The organization's mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.*

** Based on data from the 2011 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees*