



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

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International Graduate Applications Continue to Rise

Applications from China leap 18%; India and South Korea see renewed growth

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is reporting that the number of applications from prospective international students to U.S. graduate schools increased in 2011 for the sixth consecutive year; the 9% growth matches the gain in 2010.

The initial snapshot of graduate applications for fall 2011, released today, shows a sixth successive year of double-digit growth in applications from China, up 18%, after a 20% gain in 2010. Applications from India and South Korea showed renewed growth this year; there was a 2% increase in applications from South Korean students compared to no growth last year, and a 7% growth in applications from India after a 1% gain in 2010. China, India, and South Korea are the three largest countries of origin for international graduate students in the U.S. The Middle East and Turkey saw an increase of 12% in 2011 which is lower than the previous year's growth rate of 20%.

About three-quarters (72%) of institutions reported an increase in applications over last year, with an average increase of 11% at these institutions. The remaining institutions reported a decrease, averaging 9%.

“This year’s growth in applications from all four of the countries and regions we survey is a positive sign,” said CGS President Debra W. Stewart. “The data show that U.S. graduate schools continue to be highly attractive to international students. Yet it would be unwise to take our current position for granted, since international students have a growing number of choices in the global education marketplace.” she added.

Application trends by field of study

Applications increased in all broad fields though the increases varied between fields. Engineering and physical & earth sciences saw a 12% increase in international applications while “other fields” increased by 13% following an equal increase last year. Education increased 9%, followed closely by arts & humanities and the life sciences, both at 8%. This year’s 8% increase in life sciences is the largest gain in the field since 2007. Social sciences & psychology saw a smaller increase of 5%, compared to an 11% increase last year. The field which saw the smallest growth was business (4%), down from last year’s increase of 11%.

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Application trends by institutional characteristics

CGS also analyzes changes in international applications by various institutional characteristics. As in 2010, growth this year was slightly stronger at institutions that award the largest number of degrees to international students. This pattern was particularly pronounced for applications from prospective Chinese students: applications from China surged 26% at the 10 largest schools, but grew just 12% at those responding schools outside the 100 largest.

A 4% decline in international applications occurred in the field of business at the 25 institutions that award the largest numbers of graduate degrees to international students. This is of particular note because the 100 largest institutions combined experienced only a 1% growth on average in international applications in business, compared to a 13% gain at the institutions outside the largest 100. Dr. Stewart noted, "This may be a reflection of the growing competition in high quality graduate business programs worldwide."

A slight difference emerged between private and public institutions. Applications increased 11% at private, not-for-profit schools, and 9% at public graduate schools; last year, the difference in growth was more pronounced (12% vs. 7%).

Application trends by region

Applications from international students increased in all regions of the U.S. The increase was largest in the West (13%) and Midwest (10%) while the Northeast (8%) and the South (7%) saw smaller gains.

About the report

Findings from the 2011 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey, Phase I: Applications is based on the first phase of a three-part annual survey of international graduate student applications, admissions, and enrollment among CGS U.S. member institutions. The analysis includes responses from 230 schools, including 84% of the 50 institutions which award the largest number of degrees to international graduate student; the respondents award over 60% of the degrees granted to international graduate students in the U.S. The report is available at www.cgsnet.org .

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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 93% of the doctoral degrees and 76% 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 2009 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees