

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Katherine Hazelrigg(202) 461-3888 / khazelrigg@cgs.nche.edu

Healthy Growth in Master's Enrollment Continues at U.S. Graduate Schools

Data Indicate Increasing Number of Graduate Certificates Awarded

Washington, DC — Today the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) reported continued growth in total graduate enrollment, first-time enrollments, number of applications, and degrees conferred at U.S. universities in its report, CGS/GRE Graduate Enrollment & Degrees: 2006-2016. The majority of growth in Fall 2016 continues to be in programs leading to master's degrees, which comprise 82.5% of degrees awarded in 2015-16. In addition, the number of graduate certificates awarded by institutions participating in the survey increased by 11.8% between 2014-15 and 2015-16, suggesting that a growing number of students see the value in these micro-credentials.

"The consistent growth in applications, first-time enrollment, and degrees conferred in programs leading to master's degrees indicates that graduate education is meeting the increasing workforce demand for advanced degree holders. The unemployment rates are lower for advanced degree holders. More and more jobs are requiring a higher skill level, and graduate education is adapting to meet those needs, as evidenced by the increase in graduate certificates," said CGS President Suzanne Ortega.

For the second year in a row, all underrepresented minority (URM) groups monitored by the survey saw greater increases in first-time graduate enrollment than their White, non-Hispanic counterparts, even though their overall representation in the graduate student body remains relatively low. Among first-time U.S. citizens and permanent resident graduate students in the Fall of 2016, approximately 23.4% were underrepresented minorities, including American Indian/Alaska Native (0.5%), Black/African American (11.8%), Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (0.2%), and Hispanic/Latino (10.9%). The one-year rate of change in first-time graduate enrollment for most URM groups was greater than its respective five-year and ten-year average percentage change.

"I'm cautiously optimistic at the continued increase in overall first-time enrollments for underrepresented minorities," said Ortega. "However, URMs remain proportionally underrepresented. We still have a lot of work to do to ensure this is a sustained trend across graduate programs and leads to a more diverse workforce."

This year's survey results show first-time graduate enrollment of international students decreased 0.9% between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016. It is the first decrease since 2003, though the five-year average annual increase (7.8%) and ten-year average annual increase (7.4%) rates remain high. In contrast, first-time graduate enrollment for U.S. citizens and permanent residents increased 3.2%. Conversely, the **total** graduate enrollment increased by 2.4% for international students and decreased by 0.1% for U.S. citizens and permanent residents over the same Fall 2015-2016 period.

For the fifth consecutive year, institutions responding to the CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment & Degrees for Fall 2016 reported increases in first-time graduate enrollment (522,131). More than one half of those first-time graduate students were women (58.1%). New highs for the application and admission cycle were also achieved, with institutions receiving more than 2.2 million applications and extending over 903,000 offers of admission in Fall 2016 for graduate students in graduate certificate, education specialist, master's, or doctoral programs.

Other report findings are summarized below.

Findings by Broad Field

- By broad field of study, the largest number of total applications for Fall 2016 were in engineering (322,120), business (277,060), and health sciences (276,886). Business (83,391), education (80,274), and health sciences (64,519) were also the three largest broad fields of first-time graduate enrollment in Fall 2016.
- By broad field of study, the largest one-year increases in graduate applications occurred in the fields of mathematics and computer sciences (5.5%), physical and earth sciences (5.0%), business (3.2%), and biological and agricultural sciences (3.1%).
- Consistent with recent trends, graduate applications in arts and humanities decreased 6.2% between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016.
- First-time graduate enrollment in education increased both at the master's level (2.3%) and the doctoral level (3.0%) between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016.
- In Health Sciences, there has been a robust increase in awards of both master's degrees (13.7%) and doctoral degrees (9.5%) between 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Findings by Degree Level

- The large majority of all first-time graduate students in Fall 2016 were enrolled in programs leading to a master's degree or a graduate certificate (83.4%).
- The number of graduate certificates awarded by institutions participating in the survey increased by 11.8% between 2014-15 and 2015-16.
- At the doctoral level, health sciences (12.1%) had the largest one-year increase in the number of applications of all broad fields of study. At the master's/other level, mathematics and computer sciences (8.4%) reported the highest one-year percentage increase.

Findings by Student Demographics

- Among first-time U.S. citizens and permanent resident graduate students in the Fall of 2016, about 23.4% were underrepresented minorities.
- Particularly notable among underrepresented minorities was that for two consecutive years, first-time graduate enrollment of American Indian and Alaska Native increased (5.4% between 2014-15 and 2015-16, and 3.4% between 2013-14 and 2014-15).
- In Fall 2016, the majority of first-time graduate students at all degree levels were women – 58.9% at the master's degree and certificate level and 52.8% at the doctoral level.
- International students comprised the largest share of first-time graduate students in mathematics and computer sciences (60.7%), followed closely by engineering (55.7%).

About the report

Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2006 to 2016 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 collects data on graduate enrollment by all fields of study and is the only source of national data on graduate applications by broad field of study. The report, which includes responses from 625 institutions, presents statistics on graduate applications and enrollment for Fall 2016, degrees conferred in 2015-16, and trend data for one-, five- and ten-year periods.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced 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.