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Council of Graduate Schools Survey Finds Widespread Declines in International Graduate Student Applications to U.S. Graduate Schools for Fall 2004

Washington, D.C. – Graduate school applications from international students declined 32% over the last year, the result of declines across all major countries of origin and for all major fields, according to a Council of Graduate Schools survey. The survey was conducted in response to growing concerns voiced by its member institutions about declines in international applications. This survey generated responses from 113 graduate schools including 60% of the top 50 universities in terms of international graduate student enrollment. These 113 institutions enroll nearly one-half of all international graduate students in the U.S.

- Over 90% of U.S. graduate schools of all institutional sizes and types responding to the survey reported an overall decrease in international graduate student applications. (Only 8% reported an overall increase in applications.)
- Total international applications in the responding graduate schools for Fall 2004 declined 32% from Fall 2003.
- Of the institutions that responded, 76% reported declines from China and 58% reported declines from India, the two largest sending countries.
- Forty-seven percent of responding institutions reported a decline from Korea, 33% a decline from Taiwan, 30% a decline from Western Europe, 31% a decline from the Middle East, and 36% from all other countries.
- Thirty-two of the 50 research institutions with the largest international student enrollment responded to the survey. These institutions reported particularly severe declines, with all but one reporting decreases in international graduate student applications. Ninety percent of these responding graduate schools reported declines in applications from China, with 72% and 60% reporting declines from India and Korea, respectively. Forty-six percent of institutions also reported declines from Taiwan, 30% from Western Europe, 23% from the Middle East and 30% from all other countries.

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- International applications declined across all major fields, but the most striking decreases came in engineering, physical sciences, and biological sciences. Nearly 80% of graduate schools reported decreases in international applications for graduate engineering programs, and 65% reported declines in physical sciences. Approximately 50% or more graduate schools also reported declines in applications for programs in agriculture, biological sciences, business, education, humanities, and social sciences.
- Among the top 50 research institutions, an even greater percentage reported declines in all major fields, compared to the full survey. Over 90% of these graduate schools reported decreases in international applications for engineering programs, and 80% for the physical sciences.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) members are colleges and universities engaged in research, scholarship, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Current CGS membership includes over 450 universities in the United States

Data were collected between February 15 and March 2, 2004. The admissions process in the CGS institutions is still underway and it is not yet clear how these application declines will impact graduate enrollment in the fall. However it does portend a concern for the future.

“The alarming declines in applications reported by CGS member graduate schools are in areas critical to maintaining the scientific enterprise and economic competitiveness of our country as well as the cultural and intellectual diversity that contributes to the international renown of U.S. graduate education,” commented Debra W. Stewart, president of CGS. She urges Congress and the administration to continue to aggressively address the real and perceived problems in the visa process while appropriately assuring national security.

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