

# FINDINGS FROM 2005 CGS INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE ADMISSIONS SURVEY III: ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT



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## **REPORT OVERVIEW**

The Council of Graduate Schools has been engaged in a multi-year examination of international graduate admissions trends. One of the major components of this examination is a three-part survey of the CGS member institutions. The survey is broken into the application stage (February), admissions stage (June), and enrollment stage (September). Previous reports have presented the results of the first two stages of the survey. The major findings were a 5% *decline* in international graduate applications and a 3% *increase* in international graduate admissions (admits) between 2004 and 2005. This report summarizes the findings of the final stage of this survey concerning fall 2005 enrollment. The report also presents survey results concerning policies and procedures regarding treatment of the three-year European undergraduate degree. The primary finding of this survey is that first-time international enrollment has increased 1% from last year, yet total international enrollment is down 3%.

## **FINDINGS I: INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS TRENDS**

### **Response Rate**

In a September survey of the more than 450 members of CGS, over 125 institutions responded, including over 80% of those institutions in the top 25 in terms of international student enrollment. The survey asked institutions to report 2004 and 2005 admissions and enrollment data by broad categories such as country-of-origin and field-of-study. The questionnaire also contained questions regarding the policies and procedures in place to address acceptance of the three-year undergraduate degree.

### **Admissions**

We define admissions (or admits) as the number of students that are given an official offer of admission to the university. Some, though not all, of those admitted ultimately

enroll in the institution. The percentage of those that are offered admissions that enroll at that institution is often referred to as the 'yield' and differs greatly by institution, program, and field.

In fall 2005 compared to fall 2004, survey respondents admitted 3% **more** international graduate students (See Table 1). For institutions in the top 25, these respondents reported admitting an even larger number (+5%) of international graduate students compared to the overall trend. Most revealing about the results of this survey are the disparate findings by country-of-origin and field-of-study. As compared to last year, where nearly every field and country experienced declines in the number of admits, this year there is more variety. For instance, admits from India (+8%), Korea (+7%), and the Middle East (+12%) were balanced by a small decline in admits of Chinese students (-5%).

In terms of admits by field-of-study the results were as follows: education (-3%), humanities (-1%), life sciences (-2%), and social sciences (-1%) all experienced declines in admits, while engineering (+3%), physical sciences (+8%), and business (0%) all had increases or no change in admits. It is important to note that programs in life sciences, social sciences, and physical sciences admitted the most international students overall, while programs in the humanities and education admit relatively few.

## **First-Time Enrollment**

### *Overall*

As described above, once students are admitted to an institution they then make decisions about enrollment. We asked institutions how many new students, or those enrolled for the first-time, they had in fall 2005 compared to fall 2004. It is important to note, for some campuses, the timing of the survey came at a very early point in their semester. For these institutions, we asked that they estimate their enrollment figures, if final numbers had not yet been determined. For that reason, the findings from this report are an early estimate of enrollment trends for those respondents to the survey. We are currently conducting our annual enrollment and degree survey to determine conclusively this year's final enrollment and degree trends.

Based on the latest survey results, half of the institutions (50%) reported increases in first-time international enrollment leading to an **increase**, +1%, in the number of first-time international graduate students between 2004 and 2005. This small increase comes after three consecutive years of declines in first-time international enrollment (-8% in 2002, -10% in 2003, and -3% in 2004). An interesting dimension of this survey is these increases were expressed more distinctly in those institutions in the top 25 in terms of international student enrollment. Compared to the overall findings, these institutions report increasing 4% in first-time enrollment.

### *Country-of-Origin*

This survey further inquired about three countries-of-origin (China, India, and Korea) and one region (the Middle East<sup>1</sup>). First-time graduate enrollment increased the most from the Middle East (+11%) followed by Korea (+5%), China (+3%) and India (+2%). The finding for China is particularly noteworthy because the declines reported last year (2004) in applications (-45%) and enrollment (-8% first-time enrollment) for China were the most pronounced of any of the countries. Annually, China and India send the most students to the U.S.

### *Field-of-Study*

The results of the survey for field-of-study show a much more mixed set of trends. For three of the fields with the most international students (business +7%, engineering +3%, and the physical sciences +1%), institutions reported **increases**. For several other fields (education -15%, humanities -2%, life sciences -1%, and social sciences -2%), institutions reported overall **declines**.

## **Total Enrollment**

### *Overall*

Since many graduate students, particularly at the doctoral level, spend upwards of 5 to 6 years to complete their degree program, changes in total enrollment lag behind changes in first-time enrollment. As a result, while we do find a small increase for first-time student, total international graduate enrollment is still down at two-thirds (67%) of reporting institutions, declining by 3% overall this year. For those institutions that did report declines in first-time enrollment, the vast majority (83%) reported declines in total enrollment. For those institutions that reported increases in first-time, approximately half reported increases and half reported decreases in total enrollment. Similar to the first-time differences, the trend for those institutions in the top 25 is slightly less negative than the overall trend. Institutions in the top 25 reported a -2% change in total international enrollment compared to the -3% overall trend.

### *Country-of-Origin*

The findings for total enrollment by country-of-origin also lagged behind the first-time enrollment figures. Responding institutions showed moderate declines from China (-2%), India (-4%), and Korea (-4%) but a small increase (+1%) from the Middle East.

### *Field-of-Study*

With the exception of the humanities (+1%), all major fields showed declines in total international graduate enrollment. The largest declines were in business and education

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East: Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

(-8% each), followed by engineering (-6%), life sciences (-5%), social sciences (-4%), and physical sciences (-1%).

### **INTERNATIONAL ADMISSIONS YIELD**

As mentioned earlier, the enrollment yield expresses the percentage of those students who were admitted that ultimately enrolled. In 2004, 43% of international admitted students enrolled, while in 2005 38% of international students enrolled. Interpreting this difference is challenging, given the variety of factors that are related to enrollment decisions. We do not know if fewer students decided to enroll at all or whether they opted to enroll in graduate programs in other countries. Anecdotal evidence from Canada suggests that Canadian institutions are experiencing large increases in international student enrollment. This is supported by evidence from Findings from the 2005 International Graduate Student Admissions Survey II (available at the CGS website: [www.cgsnet.org](http://www.cgsnet.org)), that a substantial percentage of graduate schools believe they are losing admitted students to other countries. However, without more detailed information about student decisions, it is too difficult to fully interpret such small changes in yield.

### **FINDINGS II: PROCESSES AND POLICIES REGARDING THREE-YEAR DEGREES**

Another dimension of the international student issue for U.S. graduate schools relates to the policies and procedures for admitting students from a variety of countries, each country with very different undergraduate preparation and degree structures. This has long been an issue for a handful of countries that have always have conferred three-year undergraduate degrees, but has become an increasingly prominent issue in the graduate community as the majority of Europe moves toward a three-year undergraduate degree program. The harmonization of European degree structures is one component of what is commonly referred to as the Bologna Process and represents the work of 45 countries to make higher education across Europe more effective through greater transparency, mobility, and collaboration. The three-year undergraduate bachelors degree followed by a two-year master's degree is the template all are committed to follow.

A critical issue for U.S. graduate schools is how to treat the three-year undergraduate degree that will emerge as the dominant undergraduate credential for most students studying at European colleges and universities. Until now, there has been little empirical information regarding how U.S. graduate schools are treating three-year degrees and how they anticipate treating them in the future.

Earlier CGS work in 2004 documented the variation in institutional practices emerging in regard to acceptance of the new three-year Bologna bachelor's degree. This survey further explored current institutional practices in this regard.

The first question we asked concerned the significance of the issue on each campus.

*Question 1: Through the Bologna Process, European countries have recently introduced a uniform three-year bachelor's and two-year master's degree*

*structure. In your opinion, has accepting students with three-year undergraduate degrees become an issue within the graduate school or in graduate admissions at your institution? (please mark one)*

A majority, 63%, of institutions reported that this was an issue (19% a “major issue”; 44 percent a “minor issue”), while the remaining institutions reported that it was not an issue.

The graduate school has typically played the role of setting campus-wide standards for graduate programs, including graduate admissions. We were curious about the role graduate schools are playing in decision-making regarding the three-year degree. The second question we asked was:

*Question 2: If a major or minor issue, has this issue been resolved **primarily** within the graduate school or elsewhere on campus? (please mark one)*

For those respondents that believed the issue to be major or minor, nearly half of respondents (49%) reported that the graduate school was primarily in charge of resolving this issue. An additional 40% reported that the issue was being addressed in collaboration between the graduate school and academic departments. Very few respondents reported that the decision was being handled primarily by academic departments.

Given that many institutions are handling the issue of the three-year degree to some extent centrally in the graduate school, our next inquiry related to how the issue was ultimately resolved: either with a uniform campus policy or in a way that varied across departments, schools, or programs. We asked respondents:

*Question 3: Is there a single institution-wide international admissions policy or are these different policies for different academic departments?*

Many institutions reported that the issue had not yet been resolved or was on the agenda for a major discussion by campus officials, but a majority of institutions (56%) reported that there is a single institution-wide international admissions policy regarding the three-year degree. Smaller numbers of respondents reported that there were different policies (17%) or some combination (20%). Illustrative of this, one respondent wrote: “Three year degrees are acceptable for the MBA but for no other programs.”

Whether or not there is a single or are multiple policies, the underlying question of this inquiry relates to how three-year degrees are addressed. The final question we asked was:

*Question 4: Recognizing that variety may occur across your institution, which of the following **best** describes your institution’s approach to evaluating three-year undergraduate degrees? (please mark one):*

*acceptance of four-year bachelor’s degree only*

*provisional acceptance of three-year bachelor’s with requirement for additional “remedial” courses*

*\_\_\_\_\_evaluation of three-year degree for equivalency (13-year secondary education preference)*

*\_\_\_\_\_determination of competency to succeed in U.S. graduate program rather than strict equivalency*

The largest percentage of respondents (37%) reported that they evaluate the three-year degree for equivalency. Indicative of this approach, one respondent wrote: “We look more at quality/competency than years of education. We nominally require the usual 16 years but have made exceptions for excellent students from good education systems. We see no reason not to accept students with 3-year BA's.” Another respondent wrote: “We have accepted three year degrees but routinely with the requirement that the candidate show additional work, or show that work completed is equivalent to a four year degree.”

A related approach adopted by a significant portion of institutions use (18%) is to determine the competency of the applicant to succeed in the graduate program. Such an approach would necessitate a close reading of the student’s transcript for the relevance of course work and applicability of that preparation for the degree program.

A relatively small percentage of institutions (9%) grant provisional acceptance for students with three-year degrees and require the student to take additional course work to remediate any deficiencies.

It is interesting to note that less than a quarter of the responding institutions (22%) report that they only accept four-year bachelor degrees, thereby automatically denying admission to the three-year Bologna degree students. Many of these respondents indicated that they do admit students with three-year degrees if they have also earned a master’s degree.

Across most institutions, the major theme of the survey was that significant action is occurring across the country. The establishment of task forces and committees on many campuses is one indication of how the issue of the three-year degree is an emerging priority for graduate education.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The major finding of this report is that, following several years of declines in first-time international graduate enrollment, we have an early indication that first-time enrollment is up for fall 2005. This is a positive sign, yet must be interpreted in the context of those successive years of decline. Evidence of that can be found in the finding that total international graduate enrollment is still in decline. To be sure, international student enrollment has clearly not rebounded to the levels prior to 2002. In order to reach those levels, it will be necessary to match this year’s moderate increases with continued efforts over the next decade to attract the best and brightest from across the world.

The steps being taken by graduate schools to improve their admissions processes and the efforts made on behalf of the Departments of Homeland Security and State to streamline

the visa process and project a more positive image abroad are clearly producing results as reflected in the reversal in the decline in first-year enrollment. Recent Congressional legislation to develop a strategic plan to attract international students could further advance the attractiveness of U.S. graduate schools to international students.

Another finding from this report relates to the three-year degree. Overall, it appears graduate schools are taking a leadership on campuses in interpreting the meaning of the new three-year Bologna degrees from Europe. If the Bologna Process continues at its current pace toward implementation of the three-year bachelor's degree across Europe, all US institutions must make local decisions about these degrees. Evidence from this recent survey suggests that CGS institutions are in fact taking on this challenge.

In the future, CGS will continue to track these trends and report on the findings from upcoming surveys on international admissions as well as related policy developments.

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**Table 1: Percent Change of Admits and Enrollment '04-'05**

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	<b>Admissions '04-'05</b>	<b>First-Time Enrollment '04-'05</b>	<b>Total Enrollment '04-'05</b>
International	+3%	+1%	-3%
<b>Country of Origin</b>			
China	-5%	+3%	-2%
India	+8%	+3%	-4%
Korea	+7%	+5%	-4%
Middle East *	+12%	+11%	+1%
<b>Field of Study</b>			
Business	0%	+7%	-3%
Education	-3%	-15%	-8%
Engineering	+3%	+3%	-6%
Humanities and Arts	-1%	-2%	+1%
Life Sciences	-2%	-1%	-5%
Physical Sciences	+8%	+1%	-1%
Social Sciences	-1%	-2%	-4%

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Source: Findings from 2005 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey III: Admissions and Enrollment

\* Middle East: Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

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