

# A Look at U.S. Graduate School Enrollment



**Applications to the nation's graduate schools in fall 2017 decreased by 1.8 percent from the previous year.** It's a shift worth paying attention to — in the previous five years, both applications and enrollments for master's programs had been increasing about 2 percent annually. Institutions experienced the overall decline in 2017 differently.

**+1.4%**



Private not-for-profit institutions



**-3.7%**

Public institutions

Source: *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2007 to 2017*, Council of Graduate Schools, (2018).

## More Women than Men

In fall 2017, the majority of students enrolled for the first time in master's programs were women— 59.2 percent. It marked the eighth year in a row in which women have made up the majority of graduate students and earned the majority of graduate degrees. While men are still receiving the lion's share of graduate degrees in STEM, women have fueled the largest master's level enrollment increases in mathematics and computer science over the past five years.

## Increases in first-time enrollment in master's level mathematics and computer science programs since 2012

**+18.5%**



Female enrollment

**+14.2%**



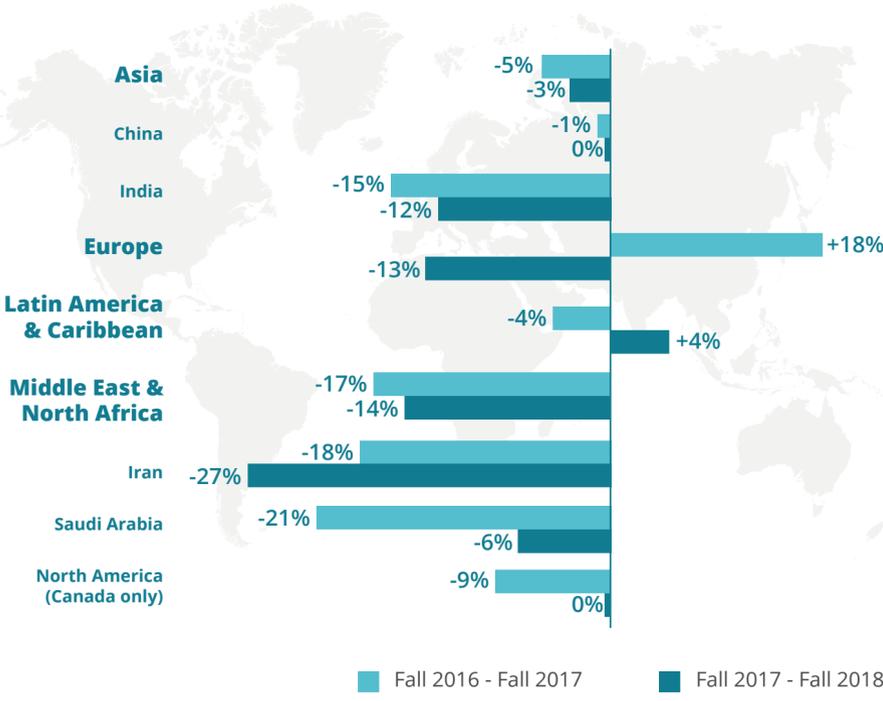
Male enrollment

Source: *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2007 to 2017*, Council of Graduate Schools, (2018).

## Slowdown in International Student Flow

For the second year in a row, international graduate applications and first-time enrollments declined at U.S. colleges and universities in fall 2018. Applications were down 4 percent, and first-time enrollments were down 1 percent. China and India continue to be the two largest countries of origin, even though India, in particular, is sending fewer students since 2015.

## Comparison of Applications by Country or Region

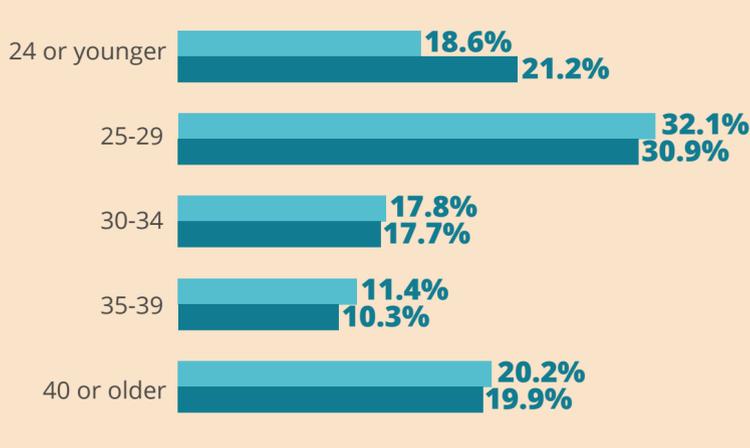


Source: *International Graduate Applications and Enrollment: Fall 2018*, Council of Graduate Schools, (2019).

## Young Adult vs. Older Adult Learners

While there isn't a "traditional" vs. "nontraditional" age for master's students because people pursue the degrees at many different ages to start, enhance, or change careers, some data suggests that the age might be getting younger, perhaps because of growth in jobs that require master's degrees for entry level.

## Age Ranges of Master's Level Student Population



Sources: *Profile and Financial Aid Estimates of Graduate Students: 2011-12*, National Center for Education Statistics, (2014). *Profile and Financial Aid Estimates of Graduate Students: 2015-16*, National Center for Education Statistics, (2019).

## Changing Interests and Pursuits

Applications to specific disciplines generally are in line with the fastest growing fields. However, engineering, in 2017, experienced a significant drop, which might have been driven by the decline in international students applying to graduate school in the United States.

## Changes in Applications, by Broad Discipline, 2016 to 2017

### UP

- +4.5%** Business
- +1.9%** Public Administration and Services
- +1.8%** Education
- +1.7%** Math and Computer Science

### STEADY

- 0.6%** Physical and Earth Sciences
- 0.4%** Biological and Agricultural Sciences

### DOWN

**-7.3%**

Engineering

**-1.8%**

Arts and Humanities

Source: *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2007 to 2017*, Council of Graduate Schools, (2018).

## What Does All This Mean for Graduate Schools?

**U.S. institutions are still the "gold standard" for graduate education**, says Hironao Okahana, associate vice president of research and policy analysis for the Council of Graduate Schools. They just have to work harder to "strengthen the pipelines" and "better articulate" how a graduate education can enhance prospective students' careers.

