Applications to the nation's graduate schools in fall 2017 decreased by 1.8 percent from the previous year. The largest declines occurred in engineering, biological and agricultural sciences, and arts and humanities. Increases in first-time enrollment in master's level mathematics and computer science programs since 2012

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 even though, in prior years, women were leading students since 2013.

Comparison of Applications by Country or Region

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, in prior years, China was sending more students since 2015.

Changes in Applications, by Broad Discipline, 2016 to 2017

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. 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.


Source: What Does All This Mean for Graduate Schools?}

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.