

## Foreign student enrollment rebounds

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**BY JUSTIN POPE**  
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International students are showing more interest in coming to the United States for graduate studies after a post-Sept. 11 drop, a welcome development for American universities and policymakers.

A report out today from the Council of Graduate Schools finds international applications were up about 11 percent last fall, following a cumulative decline of 32 percent over the previous two years. It's still too early to tell whether that will translate into enrollment growth; a previous CGS report found enrollment rose 1 percent last fall after three straight years of declines.

The downturn, blamed on visa delays, anti-Americanism and growing competition from foreign universities, had prompted alarm in academia and in Washington. Universities depend on foreign graduate students for research and teaching help -- particularly in the sciences. And many foreign policy experts consider it essential that the United States maintain its standing as the preferred education destination for students who will eventually return to leadership positions in their home countries.

"Clearly the broad gains are welcome news," said CGS President Debra Stewart. "Applications are up from all countries and regions that we study."

There were significant increases from the two top source countries for foreign graduate students -- India (up 23 percent) and China (up 21 percent). There was also strong interest in fields where U.S. universities are particularly dependent on foreign talent: engineering (up 17 percent) and science (life sciences rose 16 percent).

Educators credit improvements in the visa process by the Homeland Security and State departments for much of the progress. The State Department has also worked aggressively to sell the United States as welcoming for students, particularly in China, though it faced a wave of bad publicity in India recently over visa delays for a prominent scientist, Goverdhan Mehta.

Stewart said serious concerns remain about whether the United States can attract the most talented students. Earlier this month, the British government unveiled immigration reforms partly intended to attract more students. Asian students also are getting more domestic options.

"In the long run that's the big story," said Harvey Waterman, associate dean for academic affairs at the Rutgers Graduate School in New Brunswick, N.J., where international applications are running slightly ahead of last year. "The Chinese and Indians are building graduate education domestically at a rapid clip."