

‘U.S. Graduate Schools Report 11% Gain in Foreign Applicants

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By Paul Basken

March 23 (Bloomberg) -- Applications from foreign students to U.S. graduate schools increased 11 percent this year, ending two years of declines attributed to the U.S. battle against terrorism, the Council of Graduate Schools reported.

The increase reflects a series of efforts to attract foreigners both by the graduate schools and by the U.S. government, which has cut delays in visa processing, said Debra Stewart, president of the Washington-based council.

The increase in applications for the fall 2006 semester follows a two-year cumulative decline of 32 percent and leaves the number of international applications to U.S. graduate schools still down 23 percent since 2003, the council said.

“It would be a mistake to presume that things are back to normal,” Stewart said in a statement. “We must be vigilant in adopting policies that encourage international students to pursue graduate study in the U.S.”

Foreign applications to U.S. colleges declined after Congress, in response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks, tightened rules for entry into the country. The declines, particularly in scientific fields, threaten U.S. economic competitiveness and security, Stewart said.

The U.S. faces challenges from other countries that increasingly recognize the value to their economies of such students, the council said. British Prime Minister Tony Blair earlier this month announced a new immigration policy to attract students and skilled workers from abroad.

The Bush administration, as part of its effort to boost applications, announced in January plans to offer more Fulbright scholarships and to send university presidents on recruiting trips overseas.

Applications to U.S. graduate schools for fall 2006 increased 21 percent from China and 23 percent from India, the two leading contributors of foreign students to the U.S., the Council of Graduate Schools said.