



Trough, whipsaw or long slide?

International graduate student enrollments fell, then rose. Global trends, still somewhat hazy, are involved.

Graduate schools in the U.S. are watching international enrollment figures carefully. Though their overall enrollment grew by two percent from 2003 to 2004, enrollment of international students declined 3 percent in the same year. Then, from 2004 to 2005, enrollment of first-time international students increased one percent.

Those figures are courtesy of the Council of Graduate Schools in two reports entitled *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 1986-2004* and *November 2005 Graduate Admissions Survey III, Admissions and Enrollment*.

Concern with the foreign decline abounds

"The decline of international graduate students is a significant problem," says Debra Stewart, president of the Council of Graduate Schools. "They play a crucial role in university-based research, science and engineering. It's not certain that we can easily or quickly replace them with domestic students. The number of applications was down 12 percent overall in 2004."

Nancy Marcus, dean of graduate studies at Florida State University, echoes Ms. Stewart by saying, "At least 50 percent of our international students are at the graduate level, most of them from China, India, Korea and the Middle East. Not as many

domestic students are interested in math, science, engineering, and technology. We make a concerted effort to meet our life sciences and physical sciences enrollment goals with international students."

Foreign enrollment in the U.S. sharply declined after the September 2001 terrorist attacks. After increasing by 6.4 percent annually during 1999 and 2000, international enrollments grew only 0.6 percent in fall 2002. "There was an incredible drop-off of applications and first-time enrollments of international students due to visa-related problems," Marcus notes.

At the same time competition abroad for international students has been steadily increasing. "There's a commitment by the European governments and the European Union to harmonize their higher education system. They are investing in research and graduate education," Stewart observes. "A decade ago, English became the world language of science, business and research. That gave a huge advantage to the U.S., the U.K and Australia. Now English is becoming the language of instruction in Europe. Our English advantage is being removed and the European investment strategy is starting to pay off."

"Perhaps the most serious competition will be in Asian countries," says Lewis Siegel, vice provost for graduate education and dean of the graduate school at Duke University. "In rapidly increasing numbers, China can produce baccalaureates and grant them PhDs. In ten to fifteen years, we'll have fewer people coming here for graduate degrees. But, since their research infrastructure lags ours, they'll send many people here at the post-doctoral level. We're seeing the beginning of that trend now."

And now a small increase

Enrollment of first-time international students increased one percent from 2004 to 2005.

The 2005 CGS report shows significant increases in students from China (up three percent), India (up three percent), Korea (up five percent), and the Middle East (up 11 percent).

Stewart is encouraged. "It suggests that intervention by the State

Department and our own realm to communicate to the rest of the world that graduate education is still open for business has worked," she says.

Siegel notes, "At Duke, we saw the same drop that occurred nationally. It was almost exclusively Chinese students—slightly more than a 50 percent drop in one year. Nationally, as well as

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"Many graduate deans panicked for a while," adds Siegel. "The number of American applicants kept dropping, dropping, dropping through 2001. I believe it was related to the 1990s economic boom. Now we're seeing a substantial increase in American applicants."

Learn then leave

The U.S. may actually need to employ foreign graduate students in its workforce after they graduate. If so, current visa laws are contradictory. Siegel evidences a strong opinion when he says, "A person applying to enter the United States for an education essentially has to prove that he or she will not stay here after graduation. So you have a law that says they can't stay and a U.S. workforce that's becoming dependent upon them. It's an absurd situation. And we're shooting ourselves in the foot."

Siegel sees yet another perspective. "During the last half of this century, we have been training the faculty of the world. Are we surprised that they are now able to train their own people?" ■



SUSAN FEINBERG is a freelance writer specializing in higher education. Contact her at sdfe@aol.com.