Score Architect

RESEARCH REPORT

Graduate Enrollment and Application Trends

What the published counts say about applications to graduate school, enrollment, international students and business school demand, with the limits of each data set stated.

Period covered: Fall 2024 through Fall 2026 for U.S. graduate applications and enrollment (the Fall 2026 figures are preliminary); academic year 2024/25 for international students; applications for the 2026-2027 academic year for graduate business programs; testing years 2020-21 through 2024-25 for GRE® volumes. Government series for 2010 to 2022 are included as background and marked as dated.

Free resource from www.scorearchitect.com/gre. Prepared 13 November 2026.

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Executive summary

No single organization counts every graduate applicant and student in the United States. This report puts the main published counts side by side: the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) survey of applications and enrollment, the National Student Clearinghouse enrollment estimates, the Open Doors census of international students, the GMAC survey of business school applications, and ETS counts of people taking the GRE® General Test. Each figure is shown with its period and its coverage, because the sources measure different things.

1,961,548
applications to master's and other programs at institutions answering the CGS survey for Fall 2024, of which 52% were accepted; 899,141 doctoral applications, 19% accepted[1]

537,850
students enrolled in graduate school for the first time in Fall 2024 at the 536 institutions in the CGS survey; 83% were in master's and other programs[1]

3.2 million
graduate students in fall 2025 according to the National Student Clearinghouse, a change of -0.3% from the previous fall[2]

-1.6%
preliminary change in graduate enrollment for fall 2026, with master's enrollment down 3.7% and doctoral enrollment down 0.5%[3]

-5.9%
change in graduate international student enrollment in fall 2025, a fall of 10,000 students[2]

-10%
change in total applications to graduate business programs worldwide in 2026, after +12% in 2024 and +7% in 2025[4]

- **Fall 2024 was the last full count of applications.** Institutions answering the CGS survey received 899,141 doctoral applications and 1,961,548 applications to master's and other programs. Large institutions gained applications while medium-sized institutions lost them[1].
- **Graduate enrollment was flat in 2025 and is lower in the first 2026 data.** The National Student Clearinghouse reports 3.2 million graduate students in fall 2025 (-0.3%) and a preliminary 1.6% decline for fall 2026, led by master's programs[2,3].
- **International graduate enrollment has fallen.** Open Doors counted 488,481 international graduate students in 2024/25, down 3%. The Clearinghouse then reported a 5.9% decline in fall 2025 and a 4.3% decline in spring 2026[5,2,6].
- **Computer science is shrinking and health is growing.** Graduate enrollment in Computer and Information Science fell 14.0% in fall 2025 and a preliminary 10.4% in fall 2026, while graduate Health enrollment rose a preliminary 2.0%[2,3].
- **Business school applications fell in 2026, most of all in the United States.** GMAC reports a 10% decline worldwide and a 25% decline for U.S. programs, where international applications fell 38% and domestic applications 6%[4].

Contents

1. Five sources, five different counts
2. Applications for Fall 2024
3. First-time and total enrollment, Fall 2024
4. Fall 2025 and spring 2026
5. Fall 2026: the first preliminary data
6. International students
7. Business school applications in 2026
8. GRE test-taking volumes
9. The longer run, from government data
10. What the data does not show

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How to read this report. Counts and percentages are quoted as each organization published them. Where we add simple arithmetic we say so. Several sources publish their own expectations for future years; we leave those out and report only what has been counted. Score Architect is independent of ETS and of every organization cited.

1. Five sources, five different counts

The figures in this report come from surveys and administrative records that differ in who is counted, when, and how completely. Reading them together is useful, but they cannot be added up or subtracted from one another.

SOURCE	WHAT IT COUNTS	PERIOD USED HERE	COVERAGE STATED BY THE SOURCE
CGS/ETS Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees[1]	Applications, first-time enrollment, total enrollment and degrees at responding institutions	Fall 2024; degrees July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024	536 of 760 institutions (71%)
CGS flash survey[7]	Median applications and enrollments per institution	Fall 2025	119 responses from a sample of 346 (34%)
National Student Clearinghouse, final reports[2,6]	National enrollment estimates	Fall 2025 and Spring 2026	Institutions accounting for 97 percent of enrollments
National Student Clearinghouse, preliminary report[3,8]	Year-over-year change in a fixed panel of institutions	Fall 2026 (preliminary)	7.92 million enrollments from 46.0 percent of institutions
IIE Open Doors[5]	International students at U.S. higher education institutions	Academic year 2024/25	Not stated on the page we used
GMAC Application Trends Survey[4]	Completed applications to graduate business programs worldwide	Applications for the 2026-2027 academic year	1,162 programs at 314 business schools in 39 countries
ETS Snapshot[9]	People who took the GRE General Test	Testing years 2020-21 to 2024-25	All test takers with valid scores on all three measures
NCES Condition of Education[10,11]	Postbaccalaureate enrollment and graduate degrees conferred	Fall 2010 to fall 2021; 2011-12 to 2021-22	Degree-granting institutions (dated)

Sources, periods and coverage as stated in each publication. Full references with URLs and access dates are in the Sources list; the superscript numbers link to it.

Why the totals differ

The CGS survey reports more than 1.7 million graduate students in Fall 2024, and the National Student Clearinghouse reports 3.2 million in fall 2025[1,2]. These are not two readings of the same quantity. The CGS total covers only the 536 institutions that answered its survey, which CGS sent to members of CGS or of four regional graduate school associations and which covers master's and research doctorate programs[1]. The Clearinghouse produces national estimates from institutions that account for 97 percent of enrollments at Title IV, degree-granting institutions[2].

The CGS survey is jointly sponsored by CGS and ETS, the maker of the GRE General Test[1]. We note that because this report is published by a GRE preparation service. Score Architect has no connection with either organization.

Comparing years

CGS compares years using averages per institution, grouped by size, and warns readers about them: "Because the institutions responding differ each year, observed differences may reflect both changes in

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the composition of reporting institutions and actual shifts in the underlying data."[1] It defines small institutions as those with up to 1,050 enrolled graduate students, medium as 1,051 to 3,050, and large as 3,051 or more[1]. The Clearinghouse preliminary report compares the same panel of institutions from one fall to the next, so its percentage changes are like for like, but its coverage is partial[12].

2. Applications for Fall 2024

In the CGS survey for Fall 2024, responding institutions received 899,141 applications for doctoral programs and 1,961,548 for master's and other programs[1]. Together that is 2,860,689 applications by our arithmetic. These are applications, not applicants: a person who applies to several programs is counted once for each.

Doctoral programs accepted 168,015 applications, or 19%. Master's and other programs accepted 1,016,113, or 52%. Public institutions had a higher overall acceptance rate (42%) than private institutions (36%)[1]. These are rates across all responding institutions and fields. They say nothing about any one program, and an acceptance is not an enrollment.

MEASURE, FALL 2024	LARGEST FIELD	SECOND	THIRD
Doctoral applications	Biological and Agricultural Sciences (125,185)	Social and Behavioral Sciences (123,853)	Engineering (116,249)
Master's/other applications	Mathematics and Computer Science (330,894)	Business (276,825)	Engineering (206,419)
Master's/other first-time enrollment	Business (71,796)	Health Sciences (50,520)	Education (46,864)
Doctoral first-time enrollment	Health Sciences (13,957)	Engineering (11,551)	Biological and Agricultural Sciences (10,142)
Total enrollment	Health Sciences (227,387)	Business (203,563)	Education (190,558)

The three largest broad fields on each measure, Fall 2024, with the counts CGS reports. Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Graduate Enrollment and Degrees 2025: Findings from the 2024 Survey and Insights on the Evolving Graduate Education Landscape, https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CGS_GED-2025_Report_Final.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

Larger institutions gained, medium-sized institutions lost

INSTITUTION SIZE (CGS)	AVERAGE APPLICATIONS, 2019	2023	2024
Small	510	619	616
Medium	1,902	2,807	2,695
Large	9,645	12,221	12,776

Average graduate applications per responding institution, by institution size. Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Graduate Enrollment and Degrees 2025: Findings from the 2024 Survey and Insights on the Evolving Graduate Education Landscape, https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CGS_GED-2025_Report_Final.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

Average applications at large institutions rose from 12,221 in 2023 to 12,776 in 2024. At medium-sized institutions the average fell from 2,807 to 2,695, and at small institutions it was almost unchanged (619, then 616). All three groups were above their 2019 averages[1].

The two degree levels moved differently. From 2023 to 2024, average doctoral applications rose at institutions of every size: by 18 at small, 14 at medium and 385 at large institutions. Average applications to master's and other programs fell by 20 at small institutions and by 110 at medium institutions, and rose by 143 at large ones[1].

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By field, CGS reports that average applications in Mathematics and Computer Sciences "dropped rather sharply across institution sizes", which it considers likely to reflect a lower international student application base. Business and Engineering saw higher average applications at institutions of every size[1].

3. First-time and total enrollment, Fall 2024

First-time enrollment

Institutions in the CGS survey enrolled 537,850 students in graduate programs for the first time in Fall 2024. Of these, 83% entered master's and other programs and 17% entered doctoral programs. Men made up 44% of first-time doctoral enrollment and 41% of first-time enrollment in master's and other programs[1].

INSTITUTION SIZE (CGS)	AVERAGE FIRST-TIME ENROLLMENT, 2019	2023	2024
Small	178	184	178
Medium	563	599	589
Large	1,867	2,063	2,195

Average first-time graduate enrollment per responding institution, by institution size. Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Graduate Enrollment and Degrees 2025: Findings from the 2024 Survey and Insights on the Evolving Graduate Education Landscape, https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CGS_GED-2025_Report_Final.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

The pattern by size matches the pattern in applications. Large institutions averaged 2,195 first-time enrollees in 2024, up from 2,063 in 2023. Medium-sized institutions slipped from 599 to 589, and small institutions from 184 to 178, which is where they stood in 2019[1].

Total enrollment

Responding institutions enrolled more than 1.7 million graduate students in Fall 2024. Master's programs accounted for 72% of them and doctoral programs for 28%. The three largest broad fields were Health Sciences (227,387), Business (203,563) and Education (190,558), and each had a large part-time population: 62% of graduate students in Education, 49% in Business and 41% in Health Sciences were enrolled part-time[1].

International graduate students made up 23% of total enrollment in Fall 2024, and U.S. citizens and permanent residents 75%[1].

Degrees awarded

Between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024, the same institutions awarded 86,212 doctoral degrees, 575,536 master's degrees and 52,562 graduate certificates. Master's degrees were 81% of the awards, doctoral degrees 12% and certificates 7%. Business programs awarded 20% of the master's degrees and Mathematics and Computer Sciences programs 14%[1].

CGS also reports fewer degrees per institution than the year before. Large institutions awarded on average 382 fewer master's degrees at public institutions and 419 fewer at private, not-for-profit institutions[1].

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Reading the CGS averages

The averages by institution size are useful for direction, not for totals. The set of responding institutions changes each year, and CGS notes that averages for total categories can be much greater than those for their parts, because some institutions could report a total but not its breakdown[1]. That is why the average first-time international enrollment in section 6 is far smaller than the average first-time enrollment shown here.

4. Fall 2025 and spring 2026

The CGS flash survey

CGS has not yet published its full survey for Fall 2025 in the material we retrieved. It has published preliminary data from a short survey sent to a stratified random sample of 346 member institutions between October 1 and 31, 2025, which drew 119 responses, a 34% response rate[7]. The results are medians per institution, so they describe a typical respondent and cannot be compared with the Fall 2024 totals above.

MEDIAN PER RESPONDING INSTITUTION, FALL 2025	DOMESTIC STUDENTS	INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
Master's applications	1,223	727
Doctoral applications	442	329
Master's enrollments	1,269	161
Doctoral enrollments	410	108

Median applications and enrollments per responding institution, Fall 2025. The values are printed inside the charts of a one-page infographic and were read from the page image. Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Fall 2025 Graduate Applications and Enrollment Preliminary Data (infographic), https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Applications-and-Enrollment-Flash-Survey-1.0.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[7]

Two findings stand out. International students were a much larger share of applications than of enrollments: the median institution reported 727 international master's applications and 161 international master's enrollments. And international applicants concentrated on research universities. Institutions with very high research activity (R1) received 52% of international doctoral applications and 51% of international master's applications, against 34% and 27% for R2 institutions. CGS adds that the Northeast and Southeast together accounted for over 50% of all applications and enrollments[7].

National enrollment estimates

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center publishes final estimates for each fall term in January and for each spring term in June. For fall 2025 it reported over 19.4 million postsecondary enrollments: 16.2 million undergraduate and 3.2 million graduate. Undergraduate enrollment rose 1.2% and graduate enrollment was stable at -0.3%[2]. For spring 2026 it reported 18.6 million students in total, with graduate enrollment steady at 3.1 million (-0.1%) and master's enrollment down 1.3% to 2.0 million[6].

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REPORT	PUBLISHED	GRADUATE ENROLLMENT	OTHER GRADUATE-LEVEL FINDINGS
Final Fall Enrollment Trends, fall 2025	January 15, 2026	3.2 million; -0.3% from fall 2024	International graduate enrollment -5.9% (-10,000). Computer and Information Science -14.0% at the graduate level.
Final Spring Enrollment Trends, spring 2026	June 4, 2026	3.1 million; -0.1% from spring 2025	Master's enrollment -1.3% to 2.0 million. International graduate enrollment -4.3% (-7,000).
Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends, fall 2026	October 29, 2026	-1.6% from fall 2025 (no total published)	Master's -3.7%; doctoral -0.5%. Computer and Information Science -10.4% and Health +2.0% at graduate institutions.

Graduate-level findings in the three most recent National Student Clearinghouse enrollment reports. Percentages are changes from the same term one year earlier. Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Final Fall Enrollment Trends (Fall 2025), https://nscresearchcenter.org/final-fall-enrollment-trends/; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Final Spring Enrollment Trends (Spring 2026), https://nscresearchcenter.org/final-spring-enrollment-trends/; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Preliminary Fall Enrollment Trends (Fall 2026), https://nscresearchcenter.org/prelim-fall-enrollment-trends/. Accessed 13 November 2026.[2,6,3]

Beneath a flat total, two groups moved. Graduate international enrollment fell 5.9% in fall 2025 and 4.3% in spring 2026, and enrollment in Computer and Information Science fell 14.0% at the graduate level in fall 2025[2,6].

5. Fall 2026: the first preliminary data

The most recent figures available on our access date are the Clearinghouse preliminary estimates published on October 29, 2026. Total postsecondary enrollment was holding steady (+0.2%) and undergraduate enrollment was up 0.6 percent. Graduate enrollment was down 1.6 percent, “driven primarily by a 3.7 percent decline in master’s enrollment”, while doctoral enrollment was close to stable at -0.5%[3]. The accompanying release describes the graduate decline as following little change in fall 2025[8].

By field, enrollment in Computer and Information Science was down 10.4% at graduate institutions, and enrollment in Health majors was up 2.0% in graduate programs. The Clearinghouse also reports rising enrollment among Black and Hispanic students and falling enrollment among Asian and White students at both undergraduate and graduate levels[3].

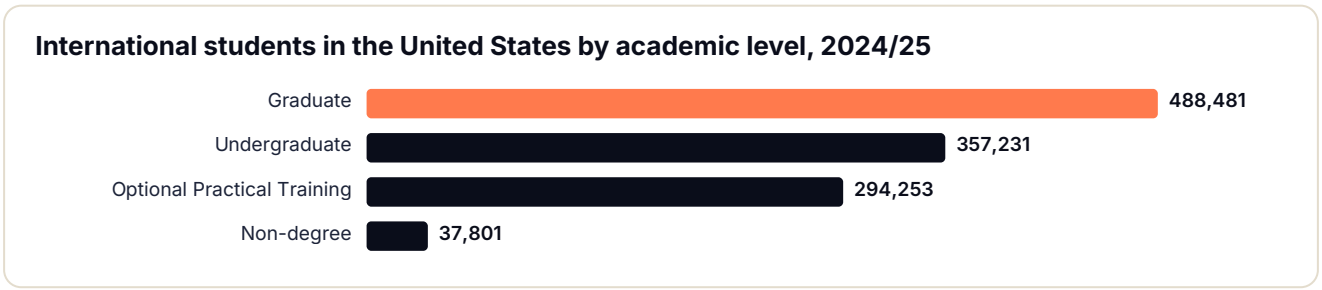
These figures are preliminary

The preliminary report reflects 7.92 million enrollments reported as of September 24, 2026, by 46.0 percent of the institutions that submit data to the Clearinghouse. It compares a panel of institutions that reported at the same point in the term in each year[8,12]. The Clearinghouse states that the estimates are preliminary and subject to revision, and that preliminary and final estimates may differ because of differences in methodology and institution coverage[3,2]. The Final Fall Enrollment Trends report is scheduled for January 2027[8]. Treat the fall 2026 numbers as an early reading.

6. International students

The most complete count of international students comes from Open Doors, published by the Institute of International Education. The latest edition available on our access date covers academic year 2024/25. It counted 1,177,766 international students at U.S. higher education institutions, a 5% increase on the previous year. The number enrolling for the first time fell 7% to 277,118[5].

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The four academic levels reported by Open Doors for 2024/25. They sum to the 1,177,766 total (our arithmetic). Optional Practical Training covers students who stayed in the United States for practical work experience. Source: Institute of International Education, Open Doors annual release: international students, https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-students/. Accessed 13 November 2026.[5]

Graduate students were the largest group at 488,481, but that number was down 3% after three years of growth. Undergraduate numbers rose 4% to 357,231, and the number on Optional Practical Training rose 21% to 294,253. India was the leading place of origin with 363,019 students, up 10%, followed by China with 265,919, down 4%. A majority (57%) studied in STEM fields: 26% in math and computer science and 18% in engineering. Business and management accounted for 14%[5].

The CGS survey shows the same turn at the level of the individual institution. Average first-time international enrollment fell between 2023 and 2024 at institutions of every size, though it stayed above 2019 levels, and CGS reports the largest decreases in Mathematics and Computer Science[1].

INSTITUTION SIZE (CGS)	FIRST-TIME: 2019	FIRST-TIME: 2023	FIRST-TIME: 2024	ALL ENROLLED: 2019	ALL ENROLLED: 2023	ALL ENROLLE
Small	11	17	14	39	45	
Medium	69	118	84	234	328	
Large	496	665	593	1,514	1,972	

International graduate students per responding institution: average first-time enrollment, and average total enrollment of students with temporary resident status. Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Graduate Enrollment and Degrees 2025: Findings from the 2024 Survey and Insights on the Evolving Graduate Education Landscape, https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/CGS_GED-2025_Report_Final.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[1]

The Clearinghouse figures for the following year point the same way: graduate international enrollment down 5.9% (10,000 students) in fall 2025 and down 4.3% (7,000 students) in spring 2026. Undergraduate international enrollment still rose 3.2% in fall 2025[2,6].

Data gap. Open Doors figures for academic year 2025/26 were scheduled for release on November 16, 2026, three days after our access date, so they are not in this report[13]. The Clearinghouse percentages above are the most recent published measure of international graduate enrollment that we could retrieve.

Looking at 2025, CGS lists restrictions on visa access for international students among the pressures on graduate education, alongside the termination of national research grants, an uncertain job market for recent graduates and stricter federal borrowing limits[1]. Entry and post-study work rules are set by each country and change. Whether you are considering study in the United States, in an EU member state or in the UAE, the only reliable source for the rules that apply to you is the government concerned and the international office of the institution. Nothing in this report is immigration advice.

7. Business school applications in 2026

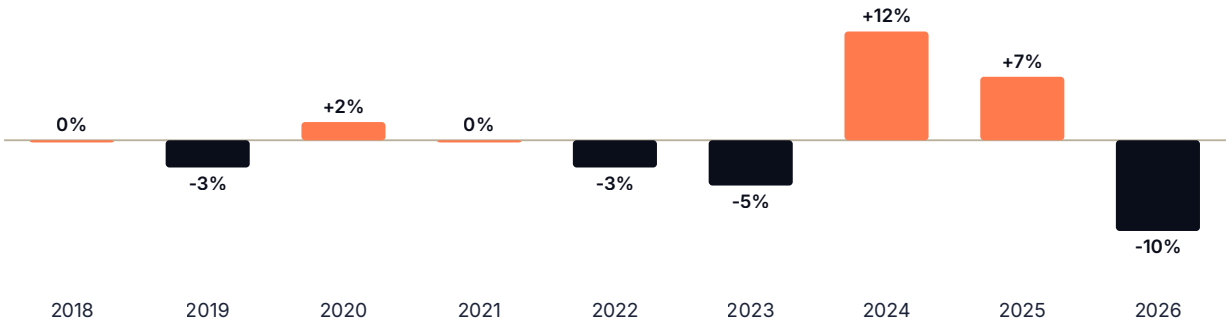
Business is one of the largest graduate fields, and it has its own application survey. The Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) collected data between June and August 2026 from 1,162 programs at 314 business schools in 39 countries, including 526 MBA programs and 597 business

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master's programs. The survey covers applications for the 2026-2027 academic year and counts completed applications only[4].

Total applications to these programs fell 10% in 2026, after growth of 12% in 2024 and 7% in 2025. Applications to MBA programs fell 13%, and applications to business master's programs fell 5%[4].

Year-to-year change in applications to graduate business programs worldwide, 2018 to 2026

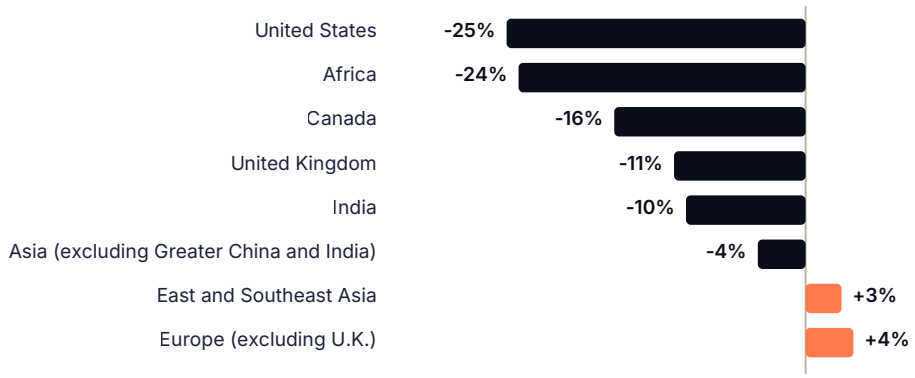


Absolute year-to-year change in applications to global graduate management education programs (GMAC Figure 1). Values read from the published chart. Source: Graduate Management Admission Council, Application Trends Survey 2026 Report, https://www.gmac.com/-/media/files/gmac/research/admissions-and-application-trends/2026-application-trends-survey/2026-ats-report.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[4]

The decline was widespread. In 2026, 62% of programs reported fewer applications than the year before and 33% reported more, which GMAC describes as the smallest share reporting growth in at least the past 10 years. Among programs that grew, half grew by more than 17 percent; among those that declined, half fell by 26 percent or more[4].

Where the applications went

Change in total applications by country or region of the program, 2026



Absolute year-to-year change in applications by the country or region where the program is located (GMAC Figure 3). Values read from the published chart. Source: Graduate Management Admission Council, Application Trends Survey 2026 Report, https://www.gmac.com/-/media/files/gmac/research/admissions-and-application-trends/2026-application-trends-survey/2026-ats-report.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[4]

Programs in the United States saw the steepest fall, 25%, with three-quarters of U.S. programs reporting declines. Applications rose only for programs in Europe outside the United Kingdom (+4%) and in East and Southeast Asia (+3%)[4].

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COUNTRY OR REGION OF THE PROGRAM	TOTAL	DOMESTIC APPLICATIONS	INTERNATIONAL APPLICATIONS
United States	-25%	-6%	-38%
Canada	-16%	-21%	-16%
United Kingdom	-11%	-9%	-11%
Europe (excluding U.K.)	+4%	+4%	+5%
India	-10%	-11%	+133%
East and Southeast Asia	+3%	-8%	+6%
Asia (excluding Greater China and India)	-4%	-4%	-3%
Africa	-24%	-24%	-15%

Change in total, domestic and international applications by country or region of the program, 2026 (GMAC Figures 3 and 4). International applications are those from outside the school's country of operation. GMAC notes that international applications are less than one percent of applications to programs in India, so a small change produces a very large percentage. Source: Graduate Management Admission Council, Application Trends Survey 2026 Report, https://www.gmac.com/-/media/files/gmac/research/admissions-and-application-trends/2026-application-trends-survey/2026-ats-report.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[4]

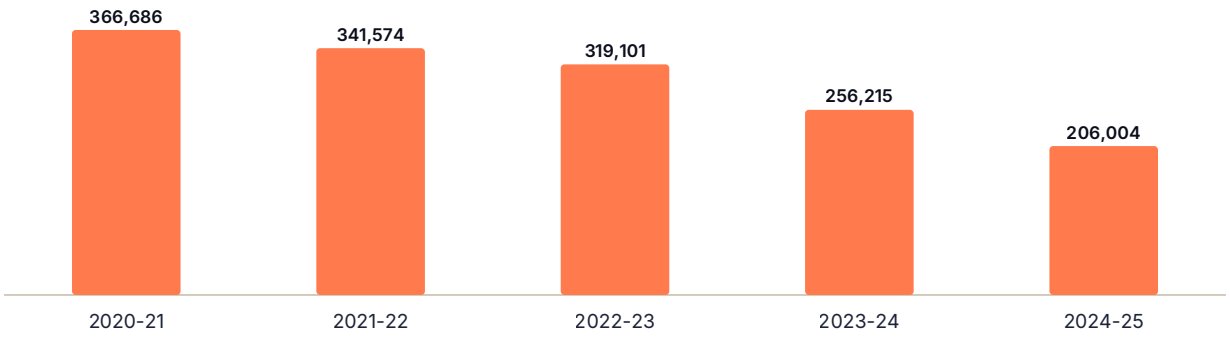
The split between domestic and international applicants explains most of the U.S. result. Domestic applications to U.S. programs fell 6%, and international applications fell 38%. Among U.S. programs, online MBA programs reported the smallest decline (-12 percent) and Master of Business Analytics programs the largest (-32 percent). Across all regions, 35 percent of programs said that changes in visa policy had a major impact on the size of their applicant pools[4].

Fewer applications did not translate into visibly easier admission in the survey. GMAC reports "little meaningful movement in global programs' average selectivity, yield, class size, or academic qualifications"[4].

8. GRE test-taking volumes

ETS publishes the number of people who take the GRE General Test in each testing year, which runs from July 1 to June 30. The count fell every year across the five testing years ETS reports: from 366,686 in 2020-21 to 206,004 in 2024-25, which is about 44% lower by our arithmetic[9].

GRE General Test takers with valid scores, by testing year



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TESTING YEAR	ALL TEST TAKERS	U.S. CITIZENS	NON-U.S. CITIZENS
2020-21	366,686	180,294	186,357
2021-22	341,574	124,151	217,392
2022-23	319,101	97,676	221,404
2023-24	256,215	85,877	170,315
2024-25	206,004	80,508	125,471

GRE General Test takers with valid scores on all three measures, by U.S. citizenship status (Snapshot Table 2.1). Each person is counted once per testing year. Source: ETS, A Snapshot of the Individuals Who Took the GRE General Test, July 2020 to June 2025, https://www.ets.org/pdfs/gre/snapshot.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2026.[9]

Test-taking volume is not a measure of applications. Many graduate programs do not require a test score, a person may take the test and not apply, and ETS itself states that its test-taker data are not meant to be representative of the population intending to attend graduate school[9]. The series is included here because it is the only one in this report that runs year by year across the whole period, and because it shows the same shift in the international share that the other sources show: the number of non-U.S. citizens taking the test rose to 221,404 in 2022-23 and fell to 125,471 in 2024-25[9]. Our companion report, GRE Scores in Context, covers these figures in detail.

9. The longer run, from government data

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) publishes the federal series, drawn from its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The pages we retrieved are dated: the enrollment indicator was last updated in May 2023 and the degree indicator in May 2024. They are useful as background and should not be read as current.

- **Enrollment.** Total postbaccalaureate enrollment rose 9 percent between fall 2010 and fall 2021, from 2.9 million to 3.2 million students. This count includes professional doctoral programs such as law, medicine and dentistry, as well as master's and doctoral programs[10].
- **Who enrolls.** In fall 2021, female students made up 61 percent of postbaccalaureate enrollment and male students 39 percent. Institutions enrolled 433,500 nonresident postbaccalaureate students, 40 percent more than the 309,300 enrolled in 2010[10].
- **Degrees.** Between 2011-12 and 2021-22, the number of master's degrees conferred rose 16 percent, from 756,000 to 880,200, and the number of doctor's degrees rose 20 percent, from 170,200 to 203,900. NCES counts degrees such as the M.D., D.D.S. and J.D. as doctor's degrees[11].

MASTER'S DEGREES CONFERRED IN 2021-22, FIVE LARGEST FIELDS	DEGREES	SHARE
Business	205,800	23%
Education	151,700	17%
Health professions and related programs	147,000	17%
Computer and information sciences and support services	51,300	6%
Public administration and social services	50,100	6%

Five fields accounted for 69 percent of the 880,200 master's degrees conferred in 2021-22. Page last updated May 2024; dated. Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Condition of Education: Graduate Degree Fields, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/ctb/graduate-degree-fields. Accessed 13 November 2026.[11]

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Set against this background, the recent figures describe a change of direction, not a collapse. Postbaccalaureate enrollment grew between fall 2010 and fall 2021, graduate enrollment was 3.2 million in the Clearinghouse estimate for fall 2025, and is lower in the first data for fall 2026[10,2,3]. The NCES and Clearinghouse series are built differently, so the two 3.2 million figures should not be treated as a matched pair.

10. What the data does not show

Limits to keep in mind

- **No source counts applicants.** CGS and GMAC count applications. One person applying to six programs is six applications.
- **Fewer applications is not the same as easier admission.** None of these sources reports the chance of admission to a particular program. Acceptance rates here are totals across hundreds of institutions.
- **The most recent numbers are the least certain.** The fall 2026 figures are preliminary, come from fewer than half of institutions, and will be replaced by final estimates.
- **Survey respondents change.** The CGS and GMAC surveys depend on which institutions answer each year.
- **Causes are mostly not measured.** Where an organization gives a reason for a change, we attribute it to that organization. We do not add reasons of our own.

Using this as an applicant

- **Look at your own field and degree level.** The totals hide opposite movements. In the same reports, master's enrollment is falling while doctoral enrollment is close to flat, and computer science is shrinking while health is growing[3].
- **Ask the program, not the national data.** A program's own application numbers, class size and funding are what affect your application. National trends do not tell you how a given department is placed.
- **Check the date on every statistic you read.** Several widely quoted figures for graduate enrollment are from 2021 or 2022. This report marks which of its own figures are dated.
- **Expect revisions.** Final fall 2026 enrollment estimates and the 2025/26 Open Doors data were both due after this report was prepared[8,13].

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Sources

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