

Nov 04, 2016 by [Adam Clayton Powell, III](#)

Fewer International Graduate Students Admitted By U.S. Universities ^[1]

TOKYO – For the first time in five years, the number of international graduate students admitted to U.S. universities has declined, according to a study by the Council of Graduate Schools.

This is a potentially ominous sign. Over the years, education exchanges have been a cornerstone of U.S. public diplomacy. Even in countries where American foreign policy is not supported, U.S. higher education was highly valued. Think of it as the new jazz, the worldwide American currency of good will, just as American jazz and later rock music helped pull back the iron curtain of the cold war.

Perhaps even more worrisome, the decline is part of a trend: After post-9/11 restrictions on U.S. visas, there was a 28% drop in international graduate student applications to the U.S. But then the number of graduate student admissions to U.S. universities rebounded, reaching a peak in 2005-2006. In that year, U.S. universities saw a one-year increase in graduate applications from abroad of 12%, and an increase in admissions of 14%.


But since then, the rate of increase of both applications and admissions have steadily dropped, and for fall 2009 offers of admission fell into negative numbers for the first time in five years.

Attracting international students has also been essential to U.S. strength in education and economic development. A study by the Gallup Organization showed that a significant part of U.S. economic growth in the 1990's was attributed to innovators attracted to the U.S. by its higher education system. And a significant number of faculty members at leading institutions came to the United States as university students. (For example, at the University of Southern California, both the Provost and the Dean of the USC Viterbi School of Engineering came to the U.S. as students.)

The declines are driven by 16% year-on-year declines in admissions to the U.S. of graduate students from both India and Korea. But in India and Korea – and don't forget China – the number of graduate students is increasing rapidly. So where are they going?

Many are staying home. All three countries are strengthening their countries' higher education institutions, expanding existing universities and building new institutions. Korea is building a new education city, complete with university campuses, as part of a new urban complex being built next to Seoul's Incheon airport. (More about the new city in this report in *The Wall Street Journal*.)

International graduate students with English proficiency are also increasing rapidly in number, and they have many attractive options in English-speaking countries other than the U.S. In

particular, Australia and New Zealand have been especially successful in attracting students from Asia. Leaders at universities from Melbourne to Auckland are quite candid about their goals for attracting large numbers of students from Asia – and they are equally candid about the financial contributions those students make to their economies. Australia receives more than Au\$15 billion (US\$13 billion) from international students, according to a government report , which describes education as the second largest export industry in the country, behind only coal and iron ore. Then there is Singapore, which plans to become a “Global Schoolhouse” as an integral part of its core economic development plan.

Meanwhile, U.S. visa and immigration policies have improved, but they are far from perfect and continue to pose barriers to graduate students and scholars from other countries. Tales of inexplicable mistreatment of visitors entering the U.S. are circulated widely overseas. As one British official told me with a smile, “Her Majesty's Government wishes to convey its appreciation to the United States immigration service for its invaluable assistance in strengthening British universities.”

A footnote: The downward trend in international students is exactly the opposite of the experience at the University of Southern California. USC, which already enrolls more international students than any other U.S. university, has seen a significant increase in applications from outside the U.S. in the past few years, and the number of admitted international students is increasing once again this year.
