

Graduate Schools See Decline in Applications

On Friday, December 5, 2008, The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) had their annual meeting in Washington, DC. One of the surprising results of this conference was the recognition that the number of students taking the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) has declined in 2008. This news was especially disturbing since trends show that commonly when the economy declines, graduate school applications increase.

The GRE is required for application to most U.S. graduate schools; the decline in GRE test-takers results also in a decline in application to graduate school. Since 2004 the number of people taking the GRE has continuously increased. In 2004, there were 501,000 people who had taken the GRE, and that number climbed to 633,000 in 2007. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) projected there to be 675,000 GRE test takers by the end of 2008, but now they only expect for there to be a total of 621,000.

David G. Payne, Associate Vice President of ETS for College and Graduate Programs, expects the number of GRE test-takers to fall due to the decrease in both the number of domestic and foreign students signing up to take the exam. Payne believes that the economic crisis is deterring people from applying for graduate school since potential students may not receive enough financial aid to cover graduate costs. The volume outside the United States is expected to fall from 177,000 to 172,000. In contrast, the number of GMAT test takers, the exam used by business schools for graduate admissions, has increased in the United States and worldwide.

The two countries that have the largest volume of GRE test-takers, and also have the largest number of students studying at U.S. graduate schools are China and India. While China's numbers are projected to continue to increase (up to 52,000 in 2008 versus 41,000 in 2007), India's have decreased from 74,000 in 2007 to 55,000 in 2008.

ETS is trying to encourage undergraduate juniors and seniors to take the GRE, even if they are uncertain of their future plans. ETS argues that since GRE scores are good for five years, it makes sense to take the GRE while students' chances of doing better are higher closer to graduation, rather than when they have been working for a few years.

On the Web: <http://www.gmac.com/gmac/ResearchandTrends/GMATStats/CurrentGMATVolume.htm>

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