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International students show new interest in coming to U.S.

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International students are showing more interest in coming to the United States for graduate studies following a drop-off after the Sept. 11 attacks, a welcome development for American universities and policy-makers.

A report out today from the Council of Graduate Schools finds international applications were up about 11 percent last fall, following a cumulative decline of 32 percent over the previous two years.

The downturn, blamed on visa delays, anti-Americanism and growing competition from foreign universities, had prompted alarm in academia. Universities depend on foreign graduate students for research and teaching help — particularly in the sciences.

"Clearly the broad gains are welcome news," said CGS President Debra Stewart. "Applications are up from all countries and regions that we study."

There were significant increases from the two top source countries for foreign graduate students — India (up 23 percent) and China (up 21 percent). There was also strong interest in fields where U.S. universities are particularly dependent on foreign talent: engineering (up 17 percent) and science (life sciences rose 16 percent).

About 275,000 foreign students are pursuing American graduate degrees, according to the Institute of International Education's latest figures. Another 180,000 are pursuing undergraduate degrees.