In fall 2020, master’s degree enrollments fell significantly. Overall, 14,003 fewer students registered than in fall 2019, a 17 percent drop. Two factors combined in a multiplier effect to drive down enrollment: First, uncertainty caused by COVID-19 suppressed enrollment the first fall of the pandemic at every degree level in nearly every engineering field. Second, international students, who represent more than half of graduate engineering enrollment, may have decided to pursue other options when administration guidance created uncertainty about visa status for students learning remotely.

Enrollment numbers could be starting to climb again, according to preliminary data from ASEE’s 2021 Profiles of Engineering & Engineering Technology. Reporting institutions have indicated a 10–15 percent increase for master’s programs, indicating that they may have begun to recover from the 2020 decline.