

Enrollment Trends in Technologist Training

Results of a study released on January 14 by the American Society of Radiologic Technologists (ASRT; Albuquerque, NM) indicate that the number of first-year students enrolling in radiography and nuclear medicine programs declined in 2014, whereas the number of students enrolling in radiation therapy programs increased. The ASRT surveyed directors of American Registry of Radiologic Technologists-listed radiologic technology educational programs, with queries about entering-class enrollments, availability of spaces for enrollment, projected future enrollment levels, and other program characteristics. The findings are available in “Enrollment Snapshot of Radiography, Radiation Therapy and Nuclear Medicine Technology Programs 2014,” available at <http://www.asrt.org/docs/default-source/research/enrollmentsurvey2014final.pdf?sfvrsn=4>.

Survey results showed that an estimated 15,211 students enrolled in radiography programs and 1,061 students in nuclear medicine programs in 2014. These figures represent an average decrease of slightly more than 1 student per class for radiography programs and 1.5 students per class for nuclear medicine programs when compared with 2013 enrollment numbers. Radiation therapy programs experienced an increase in new students in 2014, with an estimated 1,544 students enrolled in programs, for an average increase of 0.7 students per program.

According to the survey results, many programs appear to be continuing to limit enrollment numbers. The number of student applicants turned away in 2014 closely matched levels reported in 2013. In 2014, radiography programs that were not at full enrollment turned away an average of 34.1 qualified applicants per class. This figure was 15.7 for radiation therapy and 8.3 for nuclear medicine applicants. When cross-referenced with the number of students these programs could actually accommodate if full, the data suggest that many program directors are not filling their classes to capacity. For example, the survey showed on average that radiography programs could accommodate 7.2 additional students, radiation therapy 6.2 students, and nuclear medicine 8.1 students. Overall this produced an estimate of 1,061 students enrolling in nuclear medicine programs in 2014, down from 1,280 in 2013.

Projected future enrollment levels suggest an intention to continue maintenance of lower class sizes, with 86.7% of radiography program directors and 77.4% of both radiation therapy and nuclear medicine program directors confirming plans to maintain their current enrollment levels. In nuclear medicine, 17% of programs are planning an increase and 5.7% plan to decrease enrollment. “Our last 2 enrollment surveys showed that many program directors are turning away students even though they could accommodate them in the classroom,” said ASRT Director of Research John Culbertson. “We’ll closely monitor to see if this trend continues in the 2015 enrollment survey.” Survey results also noted that 7.5% of nuclear medicine programs reported that they are “likely to close” in the coming year, with 3.8% reporting that they will “definitely close.”

The survey also captured data snapshots of student characteristics in the programs. The directors reported that 36.7% of students in nuclear medicine programs failed to complete their course of study, compared with 31.2% in radiography and 26.5% in radiation therapy programs. On average, 90.5% of nuclear medicine program graduates passed the certifying examination on the first attempt, compared with 92.2% of radiography and 89.5% of radiation therapy graduates.

When asked whether 2013 graduates had been able to find employment in their primary discipline within 6 months of graduating, responding directors indicated that 83.7% of graduates from nuclear medicine programs were able to do so. Corresponding figures for radiography and radiation therapy were 85.1% and 85.6%, respectively. The survey summary indicated that these placement rates represented decreases of 0.2% from the previous year in radiography, 1.6% in radiation therapy, and 0.1% in nuclear medicine. When asked to speculate on the reasons for these placement decreases, 25.4% of respondents blamed cut-backs at hiring facilities, 24.4% cited a surfeit of graduates in relation to the number of open positions, 20.7% listed other reasons, 14.4% believed this to be the result of postponed retirement in the current workforce, 13.7% believed this to be a result of management decisions not to fill open positions, and the remaining 1.3% cited hospital closings.

American Society of Radiologic Technologists