Men Dominate MBA Enrollment in Chicago

But East Coast schools such as the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School and Harvard Business School are enrolling record percentages of women in the upcoming academic year. July 5, 2011

Chicago’s business schools looking to boost female enrollment in their MBA programs need only to look to their East Coast rivals.

The University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School and Harvard Business School are enrolling record percentages of women in the upcoming academic year. Women represent nearly 45 percent of the incoming MBA class at Wharton and 39 percent at Harvard, according to analysis by Poets & Quants, a website dedicated to graduate business schools.

Schools in the Chicago area generally can’t match these gains. In fact, female enrollment has been flat with the exception of DePaul University’s Kellstadt School, where women accounted for 40 percent of last year’s first-year students vs. 35 percent the year before. (Fall 2011 figures are not yet available.)

Rob Ryan, Kellstadt’s assistant dean, says the increase could be attributed to the growing number of women who have advanced to a point in their careers where an MBA has benefits.

At University of Chicago’s Booth School, women have represented 35 percent of its incoming MBA class for the past four years. Like many Chicago schools, Booth will not have figures for the 2011-12 class until later this summer. Female enrollment at University of Illinois at Chicago’s Liautaud School dropped to 33 percent in 2010 from 37 percent in 2009. Northwestern University’s Kellogg School has held steady in the 32 percent-to-33 percent range for the three years starting in 2008.

Female enrollment at Loyola University Chicago’s business school fell to 41 percent this summer from a high of 48 percent in the fall of 2008. Illinois Institute of Technology’s Stuart School saw the number of women slip to 38 percent last fall from 39 percent the previous year.

Michael Alexander, assistant director of academic programs at Loyola’s graduate school of business, was hard-pressed to explain why the school has the highest female enrollment among its Chicago peers. “To my knowledge, nothing has been done specifically to recruit women,” he said.

Lake Forest Graduate School of Management didn’t respond to requests for enrollment data.

It’s no accident that women are making up a greater share of enrollment at Wharton and Harvard, said John Byrne, editor of Poets & Quants and a former executive editor of BusinessWeek. Women made up nearly 40 percent of Wharton’s incoming class last year and 36 percent of Harvard’s class.
“They worked very hard on it. It was a very conscious goal to get a higher percentage of women,” Byrne said. “In general, full-time business school enrollment for women remains” fairly stable.

Comparatively, more women are applying to other graduate programs such as medical and law school. Women represented 47.3 percent of applicants for the 2010-11 academic year, according to the Assn. of American Medical Colleges. At law schools, 45.7 percent of applicants admitted in 2010 were women, according to the Law School Admission Council Inc.

At the undergraduate level, women have been in the majority for years, and the U.S. Education Department projects they will account for 57 percent of four-year college students nationally by 2013.

DePaul University’s Kellstadt School is seeing more women enrolling in its master’s of science program, particularly in accounting, marketing and real estate analysis, Ryan said. “There is a younger profile in the MS programs. They are right out of (undergraduate) school.”