



National Collegiate Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates

Since 1983, ACT has collected a comprehensive database of first- to second-year retention rates and persistence to degree rates. These rates provide national benchmarks for institution type and level of selectivity. Data are compiled by ACT from the ACT Institutional Data Questionnaire, an annual survey of information collected from two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions.

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates

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For more information, contact ACT Educational Services at 319/341-2275 or go to our website: www.act.org

Important Information About These Tables

Beginning with the 2004 ACT Institutional Data Questionnaire (IDQ), several changes took place in the format, collection, and reporting of these data.

1. The definitions of two important data elements were modified: institutional selectivity and level of degree offerings.
2. The IDQ information was collected online rather than in traditional paper format.
3. Previous tables published by ACT featured “freshman to sophomore dropout rates.” Those rates are now reported as “first- to second-year retention rates.” Individuals who compare these results with previous reports or monitor trends in these data should keep this change in mind.
4. These reports are based on data accumulated through 7/1/10.

Many of the tables are reported by institutional admission selectivity. The selectivity categories used are based on the general descriptions below.

Selectivity Level	ACT Middle 50%	SAT Middle 50%*	Definition
Highly Selective	25-30	1710-2000	Majority admitted from top 10% of H.S. class
Selective	21-26	1470-1770	Majority admitted from top 25% of H.S. class
Traditional	18-24	1290-1650	Majority admitted from top 50% of H.S. class
Liberal	17-22	1230-1530	Majority admitted from bottom 50% of H.S. class
Open	16-21	1170-1480	Generally open to all with H.S. diploma or equivalent

* SAT score ranges are a point-to-point concordance with ACT scores based on a joint study by ACT and the College Board. Selectivity ranges may vary from one institution to another.

Table 1

Summary Table: National First- to Second-Year Retention Rates by Institutional Type

Degree Level/Control	N	SD*	Mean %
Two-year Public	806	12.0	55.7
Two-year Private	84	26.4	58.6
BA/BS Public	84	13.1	67.6
BA/BS Private	394	18.9	68.7
MA/1st Professional Public	222	11.5	67.3
MA/1st Professional Private	505	14.5	71.4
PhD Public	241	9.2	78.6
PhD Private	245	13.0	80.3
Total	2,581	N/A	66.7

* Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 2

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates for Two-Year Colleges by Admission Selectivity

Admissions Selectivity*	Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Institutions in Row		
	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**
Highly Selective	93.0	1	—	0.0	0	0.0	93.0	1	—
Selective	92.0	2	2.8	50.0	2	70.7	71.0	4	47.5
Traditional	63.3	21	29.1	50.1	9	11.5	59.3	30	25.7
Liberal	56.1	16	24.4	56.8	23	7.8	56.5	39	16.5
Open	55.1	44	25.3	55.7	772	11.8	55.7	816	12.9
All Institutions in Column	58.6	84	26.4	55.7	806	12.0	55.9	890	14.0

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 3

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by Level of Selectivity and Degrees Offered

Admissions Selectivity*	Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees			All Institutions in Row		
	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**
Highly Selective	91.5	2	0.7	95.0	1	—	92.4	25	3.7	92.4	28	3.5
Selective	86.2	5	8.8	81.6	32	6.3	83.0	70	6.8	82.7	107	6.8
Traditional	72.6	40	9.7	71.5	102	7.6	74.0	105	6.9	72.8	247	7.7
Liberal	63.6	5	8.7	62.4	15	17.4	69.6	8	7.6	64.7	28	13.9
Open	57.5	32	9.4	67.3	72	12.9	75.8	33	8.5	67.1	137	12.8
All Institutions in Column	67.6	84	13.1	71.1	222	11.5	78.6	241	9.2	73.9	547	11.7

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 4

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates for Four-Year Private Institutions by Level of Selectivity and Degrees Offered

Admissions Selectivity*	Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees			All Institutions in Row		
	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**	Mean	N	SD**
Highly Selective	92.6	33	4.8	89.1	18	12.5	93.5	48	4.8	92.4	99	6.9
Selective	79.8	64	17.3	80.6	121	7.2	83.1	75	6.3	81.2	260	10.5
Traditional	66.3	138	13.1	70.5	236	10.3	72.1	78	12.4	69.5	452	11.8
Liberal	56.9	56	17.3	59.4	42	16.8	60.5	8	19.4	58.2	106	17.1
Open	63.7	103	20.6	63.3	88	19.5	79.1	36	12.6	66.0	227	19.9
All Institutions in Column	68.7	394	18.9	71.4	505	14.5	80.3	245	13.0	72.4	1,144	16.5

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 5

Summary Table: National Persistence to Degree* Rates by Institutional Type

Degree Level/Control	N	SD**	Mean %
Two-year Public	453	19.4	28.0
Two-year Private	53	27.8	53.2
BA/BS Public	47	18.7	39.6
BA/BS Private	236	23.1	55.1
MA/1st Professional Public	187	15.7	39.0
MA/1st Professional Private	393	17.6	54.4
PhD Public	229	19.0	47.8
PhD Private	208	17.9	64.7
Total	1,806	N/A	46.2

* Completion in **3 years for Associate Degree; 5 years for BA/BS**

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 6

National Persistence to Degree Rates for Two-Year Institutions by Level of Selectivity

Admission Selectivity*		Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Institutions in Row		
		in 2 yrs	in 3 yrs	in 4 yrs	in 2 yrs	in 3 yrs	in 4 yrs	in 2 yrs	in 3 yrs	in 4 yrs
Selective	Mean % = N = SD** =	77.0 1 —	84.0 1 —	84.0 1 —	0.0 2 0.0	50.0 2 70.7	0.0 1 —	25.7 3 44.5	61.3 3 53.7	42.0 2 59.4
Traditional	Mean % = N = SD** =	45.1 12 25.4	55.6 14 20.2	51.8 6 15.3	67.0 1 —	38.2 6 27.5	94.0 1 —	46.8 13 25.1	50.4 20 23.4	57.9 7 21.2
Liberal	Mean % = N = SD** =	62.3 4 21.1	67.0 11 17.2	0.0 0 0.0	18.1 7 18.6	32.1 16 23.7	19.4 5 11.7	34.2 11 28.9	46.3 27 27.2	19.4 5 11.7
Open	Mean % = N = SD** =	28.7 17 30.9	45.1 27 32.2	20.7 11 25.3	12.9 228 14.0	24.5 429 19.0	23.4 185 17.1	14.0 245 16.2	25.7 456 20.6	23.2 196 17.6
All Institutions in Column	Mean % = N = SD** =	39.9 34 29.9	53.2 53 27.8	34.6 18 28.6	13.2 238 14.6	28.0 453 19.7	23.5 192 17.7	16.5 272 19.3	28.0 506 22.4	24.5 210 19.1

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 7

National Persistence to Degree Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by Degrees Offered and Level of Selectivity

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees		
		in 4 yrs	in 5 yrs	in 6 yrs	in 4 yrs	in 5 yrs	in 6 yrs	in 4 yrs	in 5 yrs	in 6 yrs
Highly Selective	Mean % =	75.0	76.0	76.0	73.0	84.0	86.0	60.9	78.6	81.5
	N =	1	1	1	1	1	1	23	22	24
	SD** =	—	—	—	—	—	—	16.1	8.8	7.2
Selective	Mean % =	56.3	62.5	63.5	36.9	54.0	60.5	32.8	53.8	59.4
	N =	4	4	4	30	29	31	71	71	72
	SD** =	29.4	25.0	24.2	18.5	11.9	10.8	14.3	15.2	13.4
Traditional	Mean % =	24.2	40.7	45.1	21.6	37.9	43.7	21.2	39.8	46.5
	N =	32	31	32	96	95	98	97	97	100
	SD** =	11.4	13.7	13.1	12.1	13.1	12.3	10.2	13.1	11.9
Liberal	Mean % =	28.0	41.0	43.5	19.8	32.9	38.5	10.4	30.8	29.1
	N =	2	2	2	12	12	12	7	8	8
	SD** =	4.2	1.4	4.9	12.2	11.7	10.3	8.5	28.8	18.2
Open	Mean % =	14.1	21.1	26.4	19.6	32.9	36.8	25.3	41.4	48.1
	N =	10	9	10	51	50	53	32	31	31
	SD** =	11.5	16.0	16.7	14.6	16.5	15.6	20.5	17.5	16.0
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	25.9	39.6	43.4	23.6	39.0	44.4	29.0	47.8	53.7
	N =	49	47	49	190	187	195	230	229	235
	SD** =	17.9	18.7	17.8	15.5	15.7	15.3	18.3	19.0	17.3

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010

Table 8

National Persistence to Degree Rates for Four-Year Private Institutions by Degrees Offered and Level of Selectivity

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees		
		in 4 yrs	in 5 yrs	in 6 yrs	in 4 yrs	in 5 yrs	in 6 yrs	in 4 yrs	in 5 yrs	in 6 yrs
Highly Selective	Mean % =	82.9	87.1	87.0	77.3	81.9	83.6	75.8	83.8	86.5
	N =	30	30	31	15	16	16	45	46	48
	SD** =	6.0	5.0	5.5	11.8	9.5	9.2	15.5	11.7	9.7
Selective	Mean % =	63.5	70.4	72.0	55.2	64.9	66.6	54.9	66.6	69.0
	N =	43	46	45	102	103	100	64	63	67
	SD** =	12.2	10.9	10.5	15.0	12.8	11.7	12.1	9.2	8.5
Traditional	Mean % =	34.5	43.6	45.2	39.2	50.4	52.1	41.7	54.4	57.0
	N =	84	87	81	174	180	185	61	65	66
	SD** =	16.7	15.2	14.2	14.7	12.8	11.9	15.2	13.9	12.2
Liberal	Mean % =	32.3	41.3	38.9	31.8	40.7	37.7	38.0	45.7	54.8
	N =	21	28	23	31	36	32	6	7	6
	SD** =	22.5	21.8	15.1	14.8	19.0	11.8	18.8	20.9	23.7
Open	Mean % =	41.3	49.0	49.6	39.1	49.1	51.7	52.2	57.1	62.7
	N =	41	45	37	55	58	55	28	27	27
	SD** =	26.8	24.7	25.5	21.4	21.4	17.3	24.1	21.5	19.8
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	47.9	55.1	56.8	44.4	54.4	55.9	54.7	64.7	68.0
	N =	219	236	217	377	393	388	204	208	214
	SD** =	25.2	23.1	22.5	18.8	17.6	16.0	20.2	17.9	16.5

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2010