

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 online survey of information collected from two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions.

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See www.act.org/collegepersistence for more information and access to interactive charts.

Important Information About These Tables

- **Cohort description:** First-time/full-time students who were first enrolled at a postsecondary institution in fall 2012.
- **Retention rate:** Percent of first-time/full-time students who first enrolled in fall 2012 and were also enrolled in fall 2013 at the same institution.
- **Persistence to degree rate:** Percent of students completing a degree within a designated timeframe at the same institution. The tables in this document are based on the year in which a particular cohort enrolled as first-time/full-time degree-seeking students, as illustrated below.

	Number of Years to Complete				
	2	3	4	5	6
Year of First Enrollment	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007

These reports are based on data accumulated through June 6, 2014.

Many of the tables are reported by institutional 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	Mean (%)	SD*
Two-year Public	647	54.9	11.6
Two-year Private	50	64.3	22.5
BA/BS Public	80	64.2	14.1
BA/BS Private	249	69.8	18.8
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Public	174	68.4	12.3
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Private	401	73.2	13.5
PhD Public	233	77.9	11.9
PhD Private	254	80.9	11.9
Total	2,088	67.6	NA

*Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 2

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates: Two-Year Institutions by Admission Selectivity

Admissions Selectivity	Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	1	100	—	1	59.0	—	2	79.5	29.0
Selective	5	86.8	23.4	1	46.0	—	6	80.0	26.7
Traditional	12	69.6	28.0	12	49.4	12.4	24	59.5	23.6
Liberal	3	69.7	11.7	10	60.7	16.2	13	62.8	15.3
Open	29	56.5	16.5	623	54.9	11.5	652	55.0	11.8
All Reporting Institutions in Column	50	64.3	22.5	647	54.9	11.6	697	55.5	12.9

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 3

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates: 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	2	93.5	2.1	2	90.5	3.5	26	89.7	16.7	30	90.0	15.5
Selective	8	83.5	8.7	21	80.5	8.2	78	83.0	7.0	107	82.6	7.4
Traditional	32	68.7	8.7	117	69.0	8.9	116	73.4	7.8	265	70.9	8.7
Liberal	2	71.5	3.5	11	62.3	13.5	10	64.3	21.9	23	64.0	16.9
Open	36	53.9	10.1	23	55.4	15.4	3	61.0	7.8	62	54.8	12.2
All Reporting Institutions in Column	80	64.2	14.1	174	68.4	12.3	233	77.9	11.9	487	72.3	13.6

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 4

First- to Second-Year Retention Rates: 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	28	93.8	4.3	19	93.2	3.9	44	94.8	3.3	91	94.2	3.8
Selective	61	81.2	10.2	124	80.0	8.9	92	84.5	6.5	277	81.8	8.7
Traditional	98	65.2	15.5	207	69.9	12.3	102	73.5	7.9	407	69.7	12.6
Liberal	21	58.1	8.4	17	62.8	13.3	8	77.4	9.5	46	63.2	12.5
Open	41	53.1	19.9	34	62.1	14.4	8	60.0	28.5	83	57.4	19.1
All Reporting Institutions in Column	249	69.8	18.8	401	73.2	13.5	254	80.9	11.9	904	74.4	15.3

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	Mean (%)	SD
Two-year Public	326	21.9	15.1
Two-year Private	19	43.7	32.6
BA/BS Public	51	36.5	23.5
BA/BS Private	150	56.7	24.8
MA/1st Professional Public	148	38.8	17.3
MA/1st Professional Private	315	54.5	16.5
PhD Public	213	49.7	17.6
PhD Private	223	62.4	17.3
Total	1,445	45.5	NA

*Completion in three years for associate's degree; five years for BA/BS

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 6

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

Admission Selectivity		Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Reporting 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	N = Mean (%) = SD =	2 35.5 50.2	2 40.0 56.6	— — —	— — —	— — —	— — —	3 23.7 41.0	3 26.7 46.2	— — —
Traditional	N = Mean (%) = SD =	8 36.1 24.8	4 45.3 18.1	4 53.5 11.5	5 12.8 14.4	6 30.3 23.8	4 33.3 31.9	13 27.2 23.8	10 36.3 22.0	8 43.4 24.7
Liberal	N = Mean (%) = SD =	1 65.0 —	1 100 —	— — —	3 23.0 29.7	6 39.0 26.1	3 48.0 33.0	4 33.5 32.1	7 47.7 33.2	3 48.0 33.0
Open	N = Mean (%) = SD =	9 28.7 29.9	12 39.2 32.3	10 27.1 28.1	245 11.9 10.1	313 21.5 14.4	220 24.7 13.2	254 12.5 11.7	325 22.2 15.7	230 24.8 14.0
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N = Mean (%) = SD =	20 34.2 28.3	19 43.7 32.6	15 32.3 27.5	254 12.0 10.5	326 21.9 15.1	228 25.0 14.2	274 13.6 13.8	345 23.1 17.2	243 25.5 15.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 7

National Persistence to Degree Rates: 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	N = Mean (%) = SD =	2 81.5 2.1	2 84.0 1.4	2 84.5 0.7	1 30.0 —	1 63.0 —	1 72.0 —	23 61.7 18.3	19 78.7 9.9	24 80.8 8.2
Selective	N = Mean (%) = SD =	8 51.3 25.0	8 62.9 17.8	8 65.8 16.1	18 45.1 14.4	17 60.1 10.9	19 63.4 11.1	75 37.9 16.8	76 56.6 14.1	76 62.0 12.4
Traditional	N = Mean (%) = SD =	26 22.5 11.6	26 36.0 15.2	26 40.6 14.6	104 23.6 13.9	103 38.9 14.8	106 43.7 13.8	109 22.6 10.3	108 41.3 12.2	110 48.0 11.2
Liberal	N = Mean (%) = SD =	2 34.0 7.1	2 44.0 5.7	2 46.0 2.8	9 19.1 14.5	9 31.4 17.7	10 34.5 16.8	8 22.9 16.6	8 37.4 18.4	8 43.9 17.6
Open	N = Mean (%) = SD =	13 5.8 7.8	13 13.0 13.9	15 19.5 15.5	18 10.0 7.0	18 20.1 11.6	18 25.8 14.6	2 7.0 1.4	2 19.0 0	2 26.5 0.7
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N = Mean (%) = SD =	51 25.5 22.6	51 36.5 23.5	53 40.3 22.4	150 24.3 15.9	148 38.8 17.3	154 43.6 16.8	217 31.9 18.8	213 49.7 17.6	220 56.0 16.1

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014

Table 8

National Persistence to Degree Rates: 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	N = Mean (%) = SD =	24 84.7 8.9	24 88.5 7.5	25 89.5 7.0	19 76.3 8.0	19 81.7 7.5	19 83.3 7.4	39 76.7 15.0	37 85.0 9.9	42 87.5 8.3
Selective	N = Mean (%) = SD =	50 62.8 16.3	48 68.2 15.7	48 68.8 14.8	106 54.2 14.8	104 63.4 11.6	105 64.8 11.0	85 56.6 14.5	83 66.6 11.5	86 68.9 10.5
Traditional	N = Mean (%) = SD =	59 35.3 15.1	57 44.5 15.5	61 46.7 16.6	168 38.5 14.1	166 48.6 12.7	175 50.6 11.6	93 38.2 12.9	93 50.3 11.6	97 53.3 10.8
Liberal	N = Mean (%) = SD =	7 22.7 13.7	7 29.0 14.9	9 38.4 8.9	10 36.3 18.7	10 44.4 17.1	11 45.5 17.2	4 31.3 9.6	4 51.8 11.5	5 59.8 13.5
Open	N = Mean (%) = SD =	18 23.5 22.2	14 26.9 23.4	13 29.3 22.0	15 24.1 16.2	16 33.1 19.0	18 42.3 19.6	6 48.2 34.9	6 59.8 30.5	6 65.0 30.1
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N = Mean (%) = SD =	158 49.6 25.9	150 56.7 24.8	156 58.4 23.7	318 45.2 18.3	315 54.5 16.5	328 56.4 15.4	227 51.8 20.3	223 62.4 17.3	236 65.5 16.6

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2014