

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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To view this content, go to www.act.org/research and search on “retention.”



Important Information About These Tables

- **Cohort description:** First-time/full-time students who were first enrolled at a postsecondary institution in fall 2014.
- **Retention rate:** Percent of first-time/full-time students who first enrolled in fall 2014 and were also enrolled in fall 2015 at the same institution.
- **Persistence-to-degree rate:** Percent of students completing a degree within a designated time frame 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	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009

These reports are based on data accumulated through June 27, 2016.

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

Selectivity Level	ACT® Test Middle 50%	SAT® Test Middle 50%*	Definition
Highly Selective	25–30	1710–2000	Majority admitted from top 10% of high school class
Selective	21–26	1470–1770	Majority admitted from top 25% of high school class
Traditional	18–24	1290–1650	Majority admitted from top 50% of high school class
Liberal	17–22	1230–1530	Majority admitted from bottom 50% of high school class
Open	16–21	1170–1480	Generally open to all with high school 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	696	56.4	11.1
Two-Year Private	46	63.3	23.4
BA/BS Public	91	64.9	16.5
BA/BS Private	244	70.8	19.1
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Public	174	70.4	11.7
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Private	421	73.5	12.7
PhD Public	245	79.0	10.5
PhD Private	266	81.5	10.6
Total	2,183	68.5	NA

*Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

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	2	93.0	—	1	58.0	—	3	81.3	20.2
Selective	7	90.4	20.2	2	46.5	0.7	9	80.7	26.1
Traditional	7	64.0	18.1	12	51.5	8.7	19	56.1	13.9
Liberal	3	70.0	8.7	9	59.1	13.9	12	61.8	13.3
Open	27	53.1	19.9	672	56.5	11.1	699	56.4	11.5
All Reporting Institutions in Column	46	63.3	23.4	696	56.4	11.1	742	56.8	12.3

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

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	3	93.0	2.0	3	85.7	12.9	27	93.4	3.2	33	92.7	4.9
Selective	3	83.0	12.2	22	82.3	8.4	67	82.9	12.1	92	82.8	11.2
Traditional	39	71.5	9.1	117	70.7	7.9	143	74.7	7.2	299	72.7	7.9
Liberal	2	73.0	4.2	7	69.7	4.5	5	73.2	5.5	15	66.8	18.5
Open	44	55.5	16.6	25	56.7	16.1	3	71.7	2.1	72	56.6	16.3
All Reporting Institutions in Column	91	64.9	16.5	174	70.4	11.7	246	78.6	11.6	510	73.5	13.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

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	29	94.1	3.7	18	91.4	4.7	47	95.6	2.8	94	94.3	3.8
Selective	65	81.9	11.1	112	81.5	7.4	91	83.9	7.2	268	82.4	8.4
Traditional	84	64.8	14.1	233	70.8	10.5	113	74.9	7.7	430	70.7	11.2
Liberal	18	61.7	14.2	22	65.5	12.5	7	79.6	6.3	47	66.1	13.7
Open	48	55.3	21.0	36	62.4	18.6	8	66.1	13.5	92	59.0	19.8
All Reporting Institutions in Column	244	70.8	19.1	421	73.5	12.7	266	81.5	10.6	931	75.1	14.8

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	Mean (%)	SD
Two-Year Public	340	22.1	14.9
Two-Year Private	17	52.6	29.0
BA/BS Public	51	36.6	21.2
BA/BS Private	146	57.6	24.9
MA/1st Professional Public	142	39.5	18.7
MA/1st Professional Private	315	54.5	16.5
PhD Public	215	51.2	18.1
PhD Private	229	62.7	18.1
Total	1,455	45.9	NA

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

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

Table 6

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

Admissions Selectivity		Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Reporting Institutions in Row		
		In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years	In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years	In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years
Highly Selective	N =	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	1
	Mean (%) =	80.0	85.0	87.0	—	—	—	80.0	85.0	87.0
	SD =	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Selective	N =	2	2	—	1	1	1	3	3	1
	Mean (%) =	70.5	79.5	—	—	—	—	47.0	53.0	—
	SD =	0.7	0.7	—	—	—	—	40.7	45.9	—
Traditional	N =	6	3	3	4	5	3	10	8	6
	Mean (%) =	27.2	29.0	40.7	19.3	32.4	30.0	24.0	31.1	35.3
	SD =	25.6	7.9	10.3	16.0	17.2	20.1	21.6	13.8	15.4
Liberal	N =	1	1	—	1	3	1	2	4	1
	Mean (%) =	54.0	54.0	—	64.0	53.3	71.0	59.0	53.5	71.0
	SD =	—	—	—	—	15.3	—	7.1	12.5	—
Open	N =	7	10	9	268	331	252	275	341	261
	Mean (%) =	40.1	51.0	44.2	12.2	21.7	25.2	12.9	22.6	25.8
	SD =	31.0	31.8	34.5	11.1	14.5	14.5	12.7	16.0	15.9
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	17	17	13	274	340	257	291	357	270
	Mean (%) =	42.3	52.6	46.7	12.4	22.1	25.3	14.2	23.6	26.3
	SD =	29.2	29.0	31.0	11.6	14.9	14.9	14.9	17.1	16.6

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

Table 7

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

Admissions Selectivity		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees		
		In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years
Highly Selective	N =	3	3	3	1	1	1	24	22	24
	Mean (%) =	81.0	82.3	83.3	72.0	83.0	85.0	62.9	80.5	82.7
	SD =	2.6	3.1	2.1	—	—	—	15.5	7.9	6.8
Selective	N =	2	2	2	20	19	21	63	63	64
	Mean (%) =	69.0	75.0	76.5	46.7	62.4	65.9	40.6	58.9	64.1
	SD =	26.9	18.4	16.3	14.0	11.4	11.3	17.4	14.3	12.3
Traditional	N =	33	32	34	101	98	103	128	125	130
	Mean (%) =	24.8	37.8	42.2	23.6	38.9	43.5	24.4	42.7	49.0
	SD =	11.2	12.6	14.3	14.7	15.5	14.6	11.2	13.5	12.0
Liberal	N =	2	2	2	6	6	6	4	3	3
	Mean (%) =	23.0	37.5	42.0	18.2	32.7	38.2	49.0	45.0	49.0
	SD =	1.4	4.9	4.2	12.4	16.5	19.3	37.2	17.6	15.9
Open	N =	12	12	15	18	18	19	2	2	2
	Mean (%) =	8.3	15.5	18.6	9.9	18.1	23.9	14.5	25.0	28.5
	SD =	9.1	15.3	16.2	6.2	10.5	12.5	10.6	4.2	3.5
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	52	51	56	146	142	150	221	215	223
	Mean (%) =	25.8	36.6	39.3	25.2	39.5	44.2	33.6	51.2	56.8
	SD =	20.9	21.2	21.8	17.2	18.7	18.1	19.1	18.1	16.3

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016

Table 8

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

Admissions Selectivity		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees		
		In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years
Highly Selective	N =	24	24	26	18	18	17	43	41	45
	Mean (%) =	83.3	87.6	89.0	76.9	82.7	83.6	78.6	87.1	89.2
	SD =	8.4	7.3	6.8	8.3	8.1	8.4	14.4	8.4	6.2
Selective	N =	55	52	53	94	91	95	81	79	82
	Mean (%) =	63.4	68.9	70.0	57.7	65.7	67.6	56.9	66.5	68.5
	SD =	16.5	15.9	15.5	13.9	10.9	10.4	12.7	10.9	10.9
Traditional	N =	44	45	47	185	181	191	94	95	97
	Mean (%) =	35.9	45.2	45.7	39.4	48.6	51.1	39.3	50.6	53.6
	SD =	15.4	17.2	15.2	14.2	11.6	10.9	13.8	12.1	11.1
Liberal	N =	8	8	10	13	13	14	5	6	8
	Mean (%) =	29.4	35.5	40.9	30.9	40.3	45.2	34.2	50.5	53.3
	SD =	11.9	9.9	10.7	15.8	13.9	14.1	14.8	12.9	15.0
Open	N =	22	17	16	11	12	14	8	8	8
	Mean (%) =	22.2	24.4	26.4	22.2	30.9	42.1	42.5	51.6	57.1
	SD =	18.0	16.8	14.6	19.2	23.6	23.9	31.7	29.9	29.6
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	153	146	152	321	315	331	231	229	240
	Mean (%) =	50.9	57.6	59.3	45.9	54.5	56.9	52.8	62.7	65.5
	SD =	25.6	24.9	24.0	18.6	16.5	15.4	20.5	18.1	17.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2016