

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 dropout and graduation 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 element 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 12/21/04.

These changes resulted in a lower-than-usual return rate. Whereas earlier tables included information from 2,500+ institutions, these results are based on just less than 1,700 institutions. Despite this lower submission rate (which will improve in future reports), the data reported here are remarkably similar to results of previous years.

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	27-31	1220-1380	Majority admitted from top 10% of H.S. class
Selective	22-27	1030-1220	Majority admitted from top 25% of H.S. class
Traditional	20-23	950-1070	Majority admitted from top 50% of H.S. class
Liberal	18-21	870- 990	Majority admitted from bottom 50% of H.S. class
Open	17-20	830- 950	Generally open to all with H.S. diploma or equivalent

Table 1

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

Degree Level/Control	N	SD*	Mean %
Two-year Public	423	17.0	51.3
Two-year Private	52	32.5	61.9
BA/BS Public	58	13.3	70.0
BA/BS Private	291	17.5	71.1
MA/1st Professional Public	185	10.2	69.9
MA/1st Professional Private	343	11.7	75.3
PhD Public	186	9.1	78.1
PhD Private	138	9.6	82.9
Total	1,676	N/A	68.3

* Standard Deviation

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	N/A	1	N/A	0.0	0	0.0	N/A	1	N/A
Selective	90.8	5	9.0	0.0	0	0.0	90.8	5	9.0
Traditional	84.5	11	17.2	57.6	7	20.7	74.0	18	22.5
Liberal	43.7	13	37.0	59.0	14	10.0	51.6	27	27.3
Open	53.2	22	28.5	50.9	402	17.1	51.0	424	17.8
All Institutions in Column	61.9	52	32.5	51.3	423	17.0	52.5	475	19.6

* Highly Selective = ACT Score Range 27-31, SAT Score Range 1220-1380

Selective = ACT Score Range 22-27, SAT Score Range 1030-1220

Traditional = ACT Score Range 20-23, SAT Score Range 960-1070

Liberal = ACT Score Range 18-21, SAT Score Range 870-990

Open = ACT Score Range 17-20, SAT Score Range 830-950

**Standard Deviation

Table 3

First to Second Year Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Colleges for Admission Selectivity

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Only Bachelors	Offering Bachelors and Masters	Offering Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral	All Institutions in Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	87.7	90.0	92.4	91.6
	N =	3	2	18	23
	SD** =	5.1	2.8	3.6	3.9
Selective	Mean % =	87.3	76.9	81.3	80.1
	N =	2	32	73	107
	SD** =	6.4	6.8	7.0	7.2
Traditional	Mean % =	73.2	71.2	73.6	72.4
	N =	30	92	70	192
	SD** =	7.6	7.7	6.2	7.2
Liberal	Mean % =	68.1	65.1	70.4	66.7
	N =	8	23	7	38
	SD** =	11.9	7.3	8.0	8.6
Open	Mean % =	58.8	62.4	71.2	63.9
	N =	15	36	18	69
	SD** =	16.0	13.2	9.0	13.5
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	70.0	69.9	78.1	73.5
	N =	58	185	186	429
	SD** =	13.3	10.2	9.1	11.0

* See Table 2

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2004

Table 4

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

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Only Bachelors	Offering Bachelors and Masters	Offering Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral	All Institutions in Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	93.3	92.1	93.9	93.3
	N =	30	12	31	73
	SD** =	3.5	3.6	4.3	3.9
Selective	Mean % =	83.0	81.9	83.5	82.6
	N =	48	98	52	198
	SD** =	6.1	5.8	5.7	5.9
Traditional	Mean % =	67.0	72.7	73.1	70.8
	N =	111	167	37	315
	SD** =	13.0	10.7	6.8	11.5
Liberal	Mean % =	64.9	66.2	76.8	66.1
	N =	47	28	5	80
	SD** =	13.9	15.8	9.3	14.5
Open	Mean % =	62.0	71.3	84.2	68.1
	N =	55	38	13	106
	SD** =	23.3	12.7	8.8	20.0
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	71.1	75.3	82.9	75.1
	N =	291	343	138	772
	SD** =	17.5	11.7	9.6	14.4

* See Table 2

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2004

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	SD**	Mean %
Two-year Public	323	18.7	29.0
Two-year Private	34	31.4	51.9
BA/BS Public	37	17.4	40.4
BA/BS Private	183	20.5	56.7
MA/1st Professional Public	143	14.1	37.1
MA/1st Professional Private	264	15.4	55.5
PhD Public	160	18.2	47.4
PhD Private	122	17.5	64.9
Total	1,266	N/A	46.2

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

** Standard Deviation

Table 6

Persistence to Degree* Rates for Two-Year Colleges by Admission Selectivity

Admission Admission Selectivity**		Two-Year Private Institutions	Two-Year Public Institutions	All Institutions In Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	82.7	0.0	82.7
	N =	3	0	3
	SD*** =	4.6	0.0	4.6
Selective	Mean % =	18.0	22.0	19.5
	N =	5	3	8
	SD*** =	26.8	19.1	22.8
Traditional	Mean % =	77.0	29.6	44.4
	N =	5	11	16
	SD*** =	20.2	21.4	30.5
Liberal	Mean % =	49.6	26.5	28.0
	N =	21	309	330
	SD*** =	28.3	18.6	20.1
Open	Mean % =	51.9	29.0	29.0
	N =	34	323	357
	SD*** =	31.4	18.7	21.5

* Completion in 3 years for Associate Degree

** Selective = ACT Score Range 22-27, SAT Score Range 1030-1220

Traditional = ACT Score Range 20-23, SAT Score Range 960-1070

Liberal = ACT Score Range 18-21, SAT Score Range 870-990

Open = ACT Score Range 17-20, SAT Score Range 830-950

*** Standard Deviation

Table 7

Persistence to Degree* Rates for Four-year Public Colleges by Admission Selectivity

Admission Selectivity**		Offering Only Bachelors	Offering Bachelors and Masters	Offering Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral	All Institutions in Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	73.5	75.0	74.9	74.8
	N =	2	2	19	23
	SD*** =	17.7	1.4	11.2	N/A
Selective	Mean % =	60.5	43.1	52.5	49.8
	N =	2	27	60	89
	SD*** =	0.7	12.0	15.2	N/A
Traditional	Mean % =	37.0	38.4	37.2	37.7
	N =	23	75	64	162
	SD*** =	10.3	13.2	11.4	N/A
Liberal	Mean % =	27.7	28.8	30.3	28.9
	N =	3	15	4	22
	SD*** =	11.7	10.9	13.0	N/A
Open	Mean % =	41.7	28.5	39.2	33.8
	N =	7	24	13	44
	SD*** =	26.6	11.4	17.6	N/A

* Completion in 5 years for BA/BS

** Highly Selective = ACT Score Range 27-31, SAT Score Range 1220-1380

Selective = ACT Score Range 22-27, SAT Score Range 1030-1220

Traditional = ACT Score Range 20-23, SAT Score Range 960-1070

Liberal = ACT Score Range 18-21, SAT Score Range 870-990

Open = ACT Score Range 17-20, SAT Score Range 830-950

*** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2004

Table 8

Persistence to Degree* Rates for Four-Year Private Colleges by Admission Selectivity

Admission Selectivity**		Offering Only Bachelors	Offering Bachelors and Masters	Offering Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral	All Institutions in Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	84.7	83.5	83.6	84.0
	N =	27	11	29	67
	SD*** =	5.2	5.4	10.9	N/A
Selective	Mean % =	68.0	63.6	64.9	65.0
	N =	41	80	45	166
	SD*** =	10.0	11.3	9.7	N/A
Traditional	Mean % =	49.1	52.0	50.4	50.9
	N =	65	126	33	224
	SD*** =	13.4	11.6	12.6	N/A
Liberal	Mean % =	37.4	42.3	55.4	41.4
	N =	22	20	5	47
	SD*** =	14.6	15.6	25.5	N/A
Open	Mean % =	45.9	45.9	63.8	48.7
	N =	28	27	10	65
	SD*** =	22.9	18.9	21.8	N/A

* Completion in 5 years for BA/BS

** Highly Selective = ACT Score Range 27-31, SAT Score Range 1220-1380

Selective = ACT Score Range 22-27, SAT Score Range 1030-1220

Traditional = ACT Score Range 20-23, SAT Score Range 960-1070

Liberal = ACT Score Range 18-21, SAT Score Range 870-990

Open = ACT Score Range 17-20, SAT Score Range 830-950

*** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2004