



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 6/15/08.

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	824	12.4	53.7
Two-year Private	102	25.6	55.5
BA/BS Public	82	12.6	68.0
BA/BS Private	405	17.1	69.6
MA/1st Professional Public	220	11.0	70.0
MA/1st Professional Private	502	13.6	72.3
PhD Public	227	11.8	72.9
PhD Private	220	12.4	80.4
Total	2,582	N/A	65.7

* Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

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**
Selective	72.6	5	38.7	0.0	0	0.0	72.6	5	38.7
Traditional	58.9	18	31.0	56.6	11	8.4	58.1	29	24.7
Liberal	63.1	19	15.7	54.8	20	13.8	58.8	39	15.2
Open	50.6	60	24.3	53.6	793	12.4	53.4	853	13.6
All Institutions in Column	55.5	102	25.6	53.7	824	12.4	53.9	926	14.4

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

**Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

Table 3

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

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Only Bachelor's	Offering Bachelor's and Master's	Offering Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral	All Institutions in Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	87.3	91.5	90.2	89.9
	N =	4	2	26	32
	SD** =	3.4	4.9	10.9	9.9
Selective	Mean % =	90.7	80.5	81.8	81.6
	N =	3	33	66	102
	SD** =	7.1	6.6	7.5	7.4
Traditional	Mean % =	70.7	70.5	73.1	71.6
	N =	40	107	98	245
	SD** =	8.6	7.7	6.7	7.6
Liberal	Mean % =	62.4	64.1	60.3	62.9
	N =	7	14	6	27
	SD** =	13.4	9.6	17.9	12.3
Open	Mean % =	60.3	64.4	74.8	66.1
	N =	28	64	31	123
	SD** =	11.6	12.8	10.4	13.0
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	68.0	70.0	77.5	72.9
	N =	82	220	227	529
	SD** =	12.6	11.0	10.5	11.8

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

Table 4

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

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Only Bachelor's	Offering Bachelor's and Master's	Offering Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral	All Institutions in Row
Highly Selective	Mean % =	93.5	87.9	91.4	91.4
	N =	32	20	47	99
	SD** =	3.9	11.7	12.9	10.6
Selective	Mean % =	78.7	80.1	83.7	80.8
	N =	65	116	70	251
	SD** =	15.7	10.0	5.9	11.0
Traditional	Mean % =	67.1	70.9	73.1	70.0
	N =	148	238	71	457
	SD** =	12.1	10.7	10.2	11.3
Liberal	Mean % =	63.2	62.5	70.3	63.3
	N =	61	52	7	120
	SD** =	15.3	14.9	7.4	14.8
Open	Mean % =	63.6	67.2	74.3	66.3
	N =	98	76	25	199
	SD** =	19.1	16.9	13.0	17.9
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	69.6	72.3	80.4	72.9
	N =	404	502	220	1,126
	SD** =	17.1	13.6	12.4	15.3

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	SD**	Mean %
Two-year Public	442	19.5	29.3
Two-year Private	57	29.0	50.2
BA/BS Public	48	20.0	40.3
BA/BS Private	217	21.5	56.1
MA/1st Professional Public	166	14.6	38.8
MA/1st Professional Private	348	16.6	55.4
PhD Public	210	18.8	48.6
PhD Private	173	17.9	63.4
Total	1,661		46.2

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

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

Table 6

Persistence to Degree Rates for Two-Year Colleges by Admission 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
Highly Selective	Mean % =	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	N =	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
	SD** =	0.0	N/A	N/A	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	N/A	N/A
Selective	Mean % =	70.5	79.5	84.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	70.5	79.5	84.0
	N =	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	1
	SD** =	9.2	6.4	N/A	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.2	6.4	N/A
Traditional	Mean % =	31.3	48.9	0.0	9.0	24.4	23.0	23.8	38.8	5.8
	N =	4	10	3	2	7	1	6	17	4
	SD** =	36.1	32.9	0.0	4.2	11.5	N/A	30.3	28.5	11.5
Liberal	Mean % =	59.2	61.2	30.0	17.6	37.6	16.3	38.4	47.3	19.8
	N =	5	12	1	5	17	3	10	29	4
	SD** =	30.3	18.8	N/A	18.9	27.2	14.2	32.4	26.5	13.4
Open	Mean % =	26.7	46.2	25.4	14.6	26.2	24.9	15.8	27.6	24.9
	N =	18	32	10	171	418	121	189	450	131
	SD** =	26.8	29.6	24.5	14.2	19.1	18.8	16.1	20.6	19.2
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	36.0	50.2	23.0	14.7	29.3	24.7	17.7	29.3	24.5
	N =	29	57	16	178	442	125	207	499	141
	SD** =	30.8	29.0	27.5	14.2	19.5	18.6	18.9	22.0	19.7

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

Table 7

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

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's, Degree 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 % =	60.7	65.3	67.0	55.5	73.5	76.5	58.9	78.2	80.2
	N =	3	3	3	2	2	2	23	23	24
	SD** =	15.3	9.9	8.7	13.4	10.6	9.2	16.4	9.3	7.4
Selective	Mean % =	66.5	71.5	73.3	33.4	50.4	55.9	31.7	52.5	58.1
	N =	2	2	3	27	27	28	64	66	65
	SD** =	27.6	20.5	12.1	19.8	12.6	11.0	14.9	16.9	13.8
Traditional	Mean % =	23.4	39.5	44.9	22.0	37.8	43.8	20.8	39.7	46.3
	N =	31	32	31	85	86	93	85	88	89
	SD** =	10.9	12.8	13.8	13.0	13.4	12.2	9.8	12.3	10.6
Liberal	Mean % =	35.0	42.5	44.0	19.9	35.0	40.7	18.0	55.7	43.5
	N =	2	2	2	9	9	9	2	3	2
	SD** =	29.7	19.1	17.0	12.8	11.4	9.1	0.0	34.1	0.7
Open	Mean % =	21.5	27.6	22.8	18.1	32.6	37.5	26.8	42.8	48.4
	N =	10	9	8	44	42	50	31	30	31
	SD** =	29.4	30.4	18.1	9.7	13.0	11.7	21.1	16.8	15.8
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	27.6	40.3	44.3	23.1	38.8	44.2	29.4	48.6	54.1
	N =	48	48	47	167	166	182	205	210	211
	SD** =	21.0	20.0	19.0	14.8	14.6	13.4	18.3	18.8	16.2

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008

Table 8

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

Admission Selectivity*		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's, Degree 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 % =	82.6	86.7	86.9	74.9	80.4	82.9	73.0	81.9	85.1
	N =	26	27	26	15	17	16	40	43	46
	SD** =	5.3	5.1	5.7	10.7	8.8	7.6	17.7	12.9	11.0
Selective	Mean % =	62.6	69.8	70.9	57.2	66.7	68.2	54.2	66.0	67.8
	N =	41	48	42	82	86	84	50	52	54
	SD** =	10.6	9.1	8.4	14.0	11.5	11.3	12.3	9.3	8.3
Traditional	Mean % =	35.8	44.7	45.2	39.9	51.0	53.7	38.2	52.1	54.6
	N =	70	77	70	160	170	170	44	51	50
	SD** =	17.5	15.4	13.2	13.1	11.3	11.1	14.2	14.0	11.0
Liberal	Mean % =	29.4	43.2	36.6	28.7	43.9	37.5	35.2	40.1	46.0
	N =	16	26	14	23	34	23	6	7	6
	SD** =	19.5	18.4	9.3	9.7	21.4	9.5	11.5	13.1	10.3
Open	Mean % =	39.6	49.4	49.4	37.4	49.4	53.1	46.7	54.1	61.2
	N =	34	39	27	37	41	45	19	20	21
	SD** =	27.5	21.8	19.9	19.1	19.8	16.4	20.6	17.6	16.6
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	48.4	56.1	57.2	44.9	55.4	57.5	52.9	63.4	67.0
	N =	187	217	179	317	348	338	159	173	177
	SD** =	24.9	21.5	20.6	17.6	16.6	15.3	20.3	17.9	16.4

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2008