

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.

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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 8/21/09.

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	78	12.5	67.6
BA/BS Private	390	17.5	69.9
MA/1st Professional Public	216	11.4	69.8
MA/1st Professional Private	494	13.7	72.0
PhD Public	228	10.6	74.4
PhD Private	228	11.9	80.6
Total	2,560	N/A	65.9

* Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

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	71.8	4	42.8	0.0	0	0.0	71.8	4	42.8
Traditional	60.4	22	29.1	55.2	10	11.3	58.8	32	24.8
Liberal	60.6	18	21.9	54.8	22	12.9	57.4	40	17.5
Open	49.8	53	27.3	53.7	770	12.6	53.4	823	14.0
All Institutions in Column	54.6	98	27.9	53.7	802	12.5	53.9	900	15.0

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

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 % =	92.0	90.0	90.2	90.4
	N =	3	2	26	31
	SD** =	3.6	7.1	10.8	10.0
Selective	Mean % =	87.0	81.7	82.2	82.2
	N =	3	32	66	101
	SD** =	7.8	6.5	7.3	7.1
Traditional	Mean % =	71.0	70.1	73.2	71.5
	N =	37	107	101	245
	SD** =	8.7	8.3	7.0	8.0
Liberal	Mean % =	63.6	65.3	63.0	64.3
	N =	8	14	7	29
	SD** =	12.7	9.1	17.9	12.2
Open	Mean % =	59.1	63.5	74.4	65.1
	N =	27	61	28	116
	SD** =	10.0	13.0	10.3	12.9
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	67.6	69.8	77.6	72.9
	N =	78	216	228	522
	SD** =	12.5	11.4	10.6	12.0

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

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 % =	93.6	87.1	93.4	92.3
	N =	32	18	48	98
	SD** =	3.7	12.7	5.1	7.1
Selective	Mean % =	78.9	81.4	84.3	81.5
	N =	69	111	71	251
	SD** =	15.0	6.4	5.9	9.7
Traditional	Mean % =	66.6	70.6	72.8	69.7
	N =	140	237	74	451
	SD** =	13.0	10.0	8.9	11.1
Liberal	Mean % =	60.3	61.3	69.3	61.4
	N =	52	47	7	106
	SD** =	16.3	16.3	8.8	16.0
Open	Mean % =	65.5	65.9	72.9	66.6
	N =	97	81	28	206
	SD** =	19.1	18.3	15.4	18.4
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	69.9	72.0	80.6	73.0
	N =	390	494	228	1,112
	SD** =	17.5	13.7	11.9	15.4

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	SD**	Mean %
Two-year Public	439	22.2	28.3
Two-year Private	52	29.6	52.6
BA/BS Public	46	18.8	43.0
BA/BS Private	218	22.6	55.9
MA/1st Professional Public	171	15.7	38.4
MA/1st Professional Private	357	16.5	54.8
PhD Public	213	19.3	48.7
PhD Private	181	17.9	65.1
Total	1,726	N/A	45.0

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

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

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 % =	77.3	83.5	84.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	77.3	83.5	84.0
	N =	3	2	1	0	0	0	3	2	1
	SD** =	4.5	0.7	N/A	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.7	N/A
Traditional	Mean % =	41.8	51.7	50.7	10.0	25.2	0.0	38.2	43.8	50.7
	N =	8	14	6	1	6	0	9	20	6
	SD** =	25.5	24.0	27.8	N/A	13.8	0.0	26.1	24.5	27.8
Liberal	Mean % =	49.3	55.6	15.0	18.8	37.8	21.0	34.1	44.8	19.0
	N =	6	11	2	6	17	4	12	28	6
	SD** =	36.3	25.3	21.2	20.4	27.5	14.9	32.3	27.7	15.2
Open	Mean % =	26.9	49.1	16.4	13.4	25.0	23.5	14.2	26.3	23.2
	N =	12	24	7	186	416	142	198	440	149
	SD** =	31.2	33.4	29.0	13.6	19.0	17.6	15.4	20.8	18.2
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	40.9	51.6	31.4	13.5	28.3	23.5	17.1	30.8	24.3
	N =	29	52	17	193	439	146	222	491	163
	SD** =	32.0	29.6	33.0	13.8	19.5	17.5	19.5	22.2	19.7

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

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 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 % =	70.0	71.0	71.5	56.5	73.5	77.0	60.1	78.9	80.7
	N =	2	2	2	2	2	2	23	23	24
	SD** =	1.4	2.8	3.5	16.3	12.0	11.3	16.3	9.4	7.8
Selective	Mean % =	59.3	68.0	70.3	34.6	51.8	57.9	33.2	53.7	59.7
	N =	3	3	3	27	27	29	66	67	67
	SD** =	23.1	15.7	13.6	18.8	12.6	10.4	15.4	16.0	13.7
Traditional	Mean % =	24.8	41.6	46.1	21.6	37.3	43.7	21.3	39.4	44.9
	N =	31	32	30	90	88	96	89	90	91
	SD** =	11.7	12.1	12.7	12.3	13.3	12.4	10.4	13.4	12.0
Liberal	Mean % =	23.7	33.0	34.7	17.7	31.3	36.1	14.3	42.0	37.0
	N =	3	3	3	10	10	10	4	5	4
	SD** =	8.1	7.0	4.7	13.4	13.6	12.4	5.7	30.7	16.6
Open	Mean % =	15.3	33.5	31.6	19.6	32.5	37.2	26.8	42.8	48.6
	N =	6	6	5	45	44	52	29	28	28
	SD** =	10.3	35.9	18.3	13.8	16.2	13.9	22.0	18.0	16.9
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	27.8	43.0	46.5	23.2	38.4	44.0	29.9	48.7	53.9
	N =	45	46	43	174	171	189	211	213	214
	SD** =	17.6	18.8	16.1	15.2	15.7	14.6	18.8	19.3	17.3

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009

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 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 % =	84.0	88.2	88.0	75.4	80.1	81.9	74.8	83.5	86.6
	N =	26	26	26	17	18	18	43	46	48
	SD** =	5.3	4.2	4.9	11.7	10.1	9.7	16.0	11.4	9.8
Selective	Mean % =	60.2	68.6	69.3	55.0	65.2	66.9	56.8	67.2	69.3
	N =	47	51	47	88	89	88	57	58	62
	SD** =	14.4	10.7	10.1	14.3	11.7	11.2	12.2	9.6	8.7
Traditional	Mean % =	37.2	45.5	45.7	40.5	51.1	53.1	39.5	53.1	54.4
	N =	69	73	68	165	173	175	44	49	49
	SD** =	18.0	15.3	12.6	13.8	11.7	11.1	14.5	13.5	10.8
Liberal	Mean % =	29.8	41.6	36.4	29.1	43.7	38.0	36.8	41.3	47.2
	N =	20	29	22	19	27	31	6	7	6
	SD** =	20.2	20.5	16.4	12.0	17.8	13.0	14.5	15.4	13.1
Open	Mean % =	43.2	48.2	49.7	35.8	45.6	48.8	49.4	55.3	61.1
	N =	33	39	27	48	50	52	21	21	20
	SD** =	28.5	25.2	24.8	20.8	20.4	18.5	21.3	19.6	18.5
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	49.2	55.9	56.8	44.7	54.8	55.9	55.3	65.1	68.2
	N =	195	218	190	337	357	364	171	181	185
	SD** =	25.0	22.6	21.7	18.2	16.5	16.0	20.1	17.9	16.7

* See page 2 for definitions of selectivity

** Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2009