

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 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 6/1/12.

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	772	12.5	55.5
Two-year Private	70	27.9	55.5
BA/BS Public	88	13.0	65.2
BA/BS Private	353	22.3	67.3
MA/1st Professional Public	223	12.1	69.7
MA/1st Professional Private	505	17.7	70.3
PhD Public	258	15.0	76.7
PhD Private	274	14.5	80.2
Total	2,543	N/A	66.5

* Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

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 Institutions in Row		
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD
Highly Selective	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Selective	—	2	—	—	1	—	—	3	—
Traditional	63.7	18	27.2	54.9	7	6.6	61.2	25	23.5
Liberal	53.9	13	24.3	61.4	14	9.8	57.8	27	18.3
Open	48.2	36	26.7	55.3	750	12.4	55.0	786	13.5
All Institutions in Column	55.5	70	27.9	55.5	772	12.5	55.5	842	14.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

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 Institutions in Row		
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD
Highly Selective	89.5	4	2.9	95.0	1	—	92.7	25	3.1	92.4	30	3.2
Selective	79.7	3	16.0	82.2	25	5.4	83.9	74	7.1	83.3	102	7.0
Traditional	70.2	37	8.9	69.3	116	10.8	71.7	104	12.1	70.4	257	11.1
Liberal	53.4	5	12.7	65.5	10	9.3	54.7	9	29.3	58.9	24	19.8
Open	58.3	39	10.6	66.3	71	13.1	72.0	46	17.6	66.0	156	14.9
All Institutions in Column	65.2	88	13.0	69.7	223	12.1	76.7	258	15.0	72.2	569	14.3

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

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 Institutions in Row		
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD
Highly Selective	93.4	34	3.6	88.4	19	16.6	93.9	52	4.3	92.7	105	8.1
Selective	78.3	62	21.0	80.2	110	7.0	84.4	72	5.5	81.0	244	12.1
Traditional	62.7	121	18.0	69.9	227	10.9	74.2	90	10.0	68.8	438	13.7
Liberal	53.6	38	20.7	44.8	35	34.0	75.1	8	12.8	51.9	81	28.0
Open	62.2	98	22.9	66.2	114	18.5	71.6	52	22.5	65.8	264	21.2
All Institutions in Column	67.3	353	22.3	70.3	505	17.7	80.2	274	14.5	71.7	1,132	19.2

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	SD	Mean %
Two-year Public	435	17.9	25.4
Two-year Private	40	30.7	51.4
BA/BS Public	56	22.3	36.6
BA/BS Private	214	23.3	54.7
MA/1st Professional Public	177	16.9	38.3
MA/1st Professional Private	388	17.9	54.7
PhD Public	231	18.3	48.0
PhD Private	231	18.0	62.9
Total	1,772	N/A	45.4

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

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

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 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	Mean % =	38.5	42.0	42.0	—	—	—	25.7	28.0	28.0
	N =	2	2	2	1	1	1	3	3	3
	SD =	54.4	59.4	59.4	—	—	—	44.5	48.5	48.5
Traditional	Mean % =	38.7	47.8	33.7	5.5	26.6	14.5	30.4	39.6	26.0
	N =	6	8	3	2	5	2	8	13	5
	SD =	29.1	28.4	31.0	6.4	16.8	13.4	29.1	26.1	25.2
Liberal	Mean % =	77.3	71.3	—	14.2	32.7	21.3	42.2	48.6	21.3
	N =	4	7	—	5	10	4	9	17	4
	SD =	21.4	17.7	—	16.1	20.8	12.3	37.5	27.3	12.3
Open	Mean % =	20.7	47.3	32.7	13.2	22.7	23.5	13.7	24.0	24.0
	N =	16	23	13	263	419	232	279	442	245
	SD =	28.8	31.9	28.7	14.7	17.8	16.0	15.8	19.5	17.0
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	33.9	51.4	33.9	13.2	25.4	23.3	15.1	25.4	24.0
	N =	28	40	18	271	435	239	299	475	257
	SD =	34.2	30.7	30.2	14.6	17.9	16.0	18.3	20.8	17.5

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

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	Mean % =	72.0	77.0	77.8	74.0	85.0	86.0	59.4	77.4	80.8
	N =	4	4	4	1	1	1	24	23	26
	SD =	14.9	7.8	7.1	—	—	—	16.3	10.0	7.8
Selective	Mean % =	54.7	62.7	66.7	41.1	54.0	60.8	35.8	56.1	61.7
	N =	3	3	3	24	23	25	67	67	68
	SD =	31.3	28.0	26.4	21.2	13.5	10.8	14.9	14.7	12.1
Traditional	Mean % =	24.3	39.5	44.3	21.6	37.5	43.3	20.9	38.6	45.3
	N =	31	31	32	96	95	98	93	91	95
	SD =	11.5	14.3	13.7	12.6	14.0	13.5	10.7	12.7	11.6
Liberal	Mean % =	31.0	40.0	40.0	14.1	25.7	29.8	16.0	32.0	38.6
	N =	1	1	1	10	9	10	5	5	5
	SD =	—	—	—	7.7	12.0	11.2	9.6	17.4	17.4
Open	Mean % =	10.4	17.0	27.2	20.1	33.8	38.5	22.9	41.8	48.2
	N =	17	17	20	51	49	50	45	45	45
	SD =	11.4	16.0	19.5	16.7	18.6	18.1	13.0	14.9	13.4
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	25.2	36.6	41.9	23.6	38.3	43.9	29.4	48.0	54.2
	N =	56	56	60	182	177	184	234	231	239
	SD =	20.8	22.3	21.0	16.9	16.9	16.5	17.7	18.3	16.6

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012

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	Mean % =	81.4	86.1	86.5	76.7	82.4	84.3	76.2	84.6	87.1
	N =	31	31	33	18	19	18	48	46	51
	SD =	7.4	6.2	6.5	9.7	7.9	7.2	15.7	11.0	8.9
Selective	Mean % =	61.4	68.4	69.5	56.3	65.3	66.8	56.5	66.4	68.9
	N =	51	49	49	100	101	99	63	64	67
	SD =	17.3	15.3	15.0	14.9	11.6	10.8	12.5	10.8	10.0
Traditional	Mean % =	34.2	41.5	43.9	38.6	49.4	51.0	39.4	51.7	54.4
	N =	78	77	81	164	168	177	75	79	77
	SD =	15.4	13.0	13.0	13.8	12.2	11.2	14.8	13.7	12.2
Liberal	Mean % =	43.6	42.3	42.6	33.7	48.1	45.2	36.8	48.9	55.3
	N =	13	14	13	19	23	20	6	8	6
	SD =	30.0	21.5	17.3	19.2	21.3	15.4	14.1	23.2	16.4
Open	Mean % =	35.3	44.2	41.3	37.9	47.3	48.9	48.5	56.1	59.3
	N =	43	43	42	73	77	75	37	34	35
	SD =	22.6	24.0	23.2	22.8	22.7	20.1	19.9	15.7	14.8
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	48.2	54.7	55.5	44.8	54.7	55.9	53.2	62.9	66.3
	N =	216	214	218	374	388	389	229	231	236
	SD =	24.9	23.3	22.9	19.6	17.9	16.4	20.5	18.0	16.9

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2012