

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 Client Relations at 319.471.1556 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 6/19/13 and revised 10/1/13.

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	728	13.2	55.0
Two-year Private	61	25.0	58.0
BA/BS Public	88	13.1	64.9
BA/BS Private	280	22.5	67.3
MA/1st Professional Public	164	10.7	68.9
MA/1st Professional Private	397	19.1	69.5
PhD Public	217	12.2	77.7
PhD Private	228	11.5	81.3
Total	2,163	NA	65.8

*Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

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	100.0	1	—	—	—	—	100.0	1	—
Selective	100.0	3	—	—	—	—	100.0	3	—
Traditional	64.1	16	23.1	51.1	7	7.1	60.2	23	20.4
Liberal	45.8	12	25.7	63.6	11	13.1	54.3	23	22.2
Open	53.9	29	20.9	54.9	710	13.2	54.8	739	13.6
All Institutions in Column	58.0	61	25.0	55.0	728	13.2	55.2	789	14.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

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	94.5	2	2.1	94.0	1	—	89.5	26	16.8	90.0	29	16.0
Selective	83.2	5	14.4	82.1	19	5.3	84.6	70	6.4	84.0	94	6.8
Traditional	69.3	38	9.8	69.4	113	7.8	72.2	112	6.9	70.6	263	7.9
Liberal	53.4	5	10.7	64.0	7	10.8	58.1	7	22.5	59.1	19	15.9
Open	58.0	38	9.8	56.5	24	10.9	55.5	2	0.7	57.4	64	10.0
All Institutions in Column	64.9	88	13.1	68.9	164	10.7	77.7	217	12.2	72.2	469	13.0

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

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	90.7	30	17.4	90.7	18	4.5	94.2	47	3.5	92.4	95	10.3
Selective	78.8	57	17.9	79.2	109	10.2	84.6	74	5.8	80.8	240	11.8
Traditional	65.4	116	16.0	68.6	205	12.3	73.6	92	8.9	68.8	413	13.1
Liberal	49.8	32	26.3	38.0	30	33.8	73.7	7	10.6	47.1	69	30.4
Open	54.5	45	22.3	61.2	35	22.9	68.6	8	22.7	58.5	88	22.7
All Institutions in Column	67.3	280	22.5	69.5	397	19.1	81.3	228	11.5	71.8	905	19.5

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	SD	Mean %
Two-year Public	395	17.4	22.5
Two-year Private	28	32.2	51.4
BA/BS Public	57	22.0	36.0
BA/BS Private	168	24.4	58.5
MA/1st Professional Public	134	16.4	37.7
MA/1st Professional Private	310	17.2	55.2
PhD Public	193	18.0	48.9
PhD Private	192	17.9	63.5
Total	1,477	NA	43.3

*Completion in 3 years for associate's degree; 5 years for BA/BS

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

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 % =	77.0	84.0	84.0	—	—	—	38.5	42.0	42.0
	N =	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
	SD =	—	—	—	—	—	—	54.4	59.4	59.4
Traditional	Mean % =	50.0	55.3	53.7	21.0	35.0	19.0	40.3	46.8	39.8
	N =	6	7	3	3	5	2	9	12	5
	SD =	25.0	24.2	12.5	24.3	23.3	17.0	27.3	25.0	22.6
Liberal	Mean % =	77.3	72.4	—	5.7	31.9	22.0	46.6	48.8	22.0
	N =	4	5	—	3	7	3	7	12	3
	SD =	21.4	21.6	—	5.0	23.8	14.9	41.2	30.2	14.9
Open	Mean % =	17.1	40.4	20.3	11.4	22.2	23.8	11.6	22.9	23.7
	N =	10	15	9	253	382	228	263	397	237
	SD =	24.4	35.3	19.5	11.1	17.1	15.5	11.8	18.4	15.6
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	40.8	51.4	32.9	11.4	22.5	23.6	13.6	24.4	24.1
	N =	21	28	13	260	395	234	281	423	247
	SD =	33.6	32.2	26.9	11.2	17.4	15.5	16.0	20.0	16.3

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

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 % =	78.0	81.0	81.5	—	—	—	60.5	77.8	81.5
	N =	2	2	2	—	—	—	20	18	23
	SD =	—	1.4	2.1	—	—	—	17.1	10.9	8.2
Selective	Mean % =	59.8	67.8	70.6	42.8	56.1	60.9	37.5	56.9	62.6
	N =	5	5	5	17	17	17	68	68	68
	SD =	23.4	19.4	18.2	21.5	14.7	11.6	16.0	14.6	12.4
Traditional	Mean % =	23.2	37.5	42.0	22.1	38.2	43.6	21.6	39.5	46.3
	N =	33	33	35	96	95	96	101	99	103
	SD =	11.8	13.9	12.9	13.0	14.0	13.4	9.8	11.4	10.3
Liberal	Mean % =	37.5	46.0	49.0	11.2	21.5	29.4	18.6	30.4	36.2
	N =	2	2	2	6	6	7	5	5	5
	SD =	0.7	7.1	11.3	6.8	10.7	11.1	12.7	16.5	15.6
Open	Mean % =	7.1	14.6	24.7	11.4	21.2	25.4	19.7	35.3	41.3
	N =	15	15	19	17	16	17	3	3	3
	SD =	8.1	14.7	21.2	6.3	10.7	11.7	20.2	27.4	24.0
All Institutions in Column	Mean % =	24.6	36.0	40.5	22.8	37.7	42.8	30.9	48.9	55.5
	N =	57	57	63	136	134	137	197	193	202
	SD =	20.9	22.0	21.3	15.9	16.4	15.9	18.1	18.0	16.5

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013

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 % = N = SD =	82.4 29 7.2	86.7 29 6.4	87.4 30 6.4	76.7 16 9.5	81.6 17 8.2	83.4 16 7.5	78.1 41 14.3	85.8 39 10.0	87.8 45 8.0
Selective	Mean % = N = SD =	63.3 49 16.0	69.3 49 15.8	70.4 49 15.6	54.8 103 15.6	63.6 103 12.1	65.2 100 11.4	55.3 66 13.8	65.6 67 12.1	68.0 70 11.1
Traditional	Mean % = N = SD =	36.8 63 16.6	44.6 63 17.2	46.7 65 17.3	39.9 152 14.5	49.5 153 12.2	51.4 159 10.8	39.1 76 13.7	52.0 78 12.6	54.4 79 11.0
Liberal	Mean % = N = SD =	35.6 10 27.5	42.8 12 27.9	44.8 12 22.5	33.2 12 21.0	46.6 16 23.5	39.6 14 12.3	29.0 4 9.2	40.4 5 16.6	54.8 5 19.6
Open	Mean % = N = SD =	28 16 23.6	39.7 15 27.2	28.1 11 18.8	30.8 18 28.7	40.5 21 26.9	44.6 19 20.6	58.0 3 32.7	65.7 3 32.7	68.3 3 31.5
All Institutions in Column	Mean % = N = SD =	51.6 167 25.2	58.5 168 24.4	59.6 167 23.8	46.1 301 19.3	55.2 310 17.2	56.6 308 15.3	53.2 190 20.6	63.5 192 17.9	66.8 202 16.8

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2013