

National Collegiate Retention and Persistence-to-Degree Rates, 2018

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 online survey of information collected from two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions.

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To view this content, go to www.act.org/research and search on “retention.”



Important Information About These Tables

- **Cohort description:** First-time/full-time students who were first enrolled at a postsecondary institution in fall 2016.
- **Retention rate:** Percent of first-time/full-time students who first enrolled in fall 2016 and were also enrolled in fall 2017 at the same institution.
- **Persistence-to-degree rate:** Percent of students completing a degree within a designated time frame at the same institution. The tables in this document are based on the year in which a particular cohort enrolled as first-time/full-time degree-seeking students, as illustrated below.

	Number of Years to Complete				
	2	3	4	5	6
Year of First Enrollment	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011

These reports are based on data accumulated through June 29, 2018.

Many of the tables are reported by admissions selectivity. The selectivity categories are based on the general descriptions below.

Admissions Selectivity Level	ACT® Composite Middle 50%	SAT® Total Middle 50%*	Definition
Highly Selective	25–30	1210–1370	Majority admitted from top 10% of high school class
Selective	21–26	1080–1240	Majority admitted from top 25% of high school class
Traditional	18–24	970–1180	Majority admitted from top 50% of high school class
Liberal	17–22	930–1110	Majority admitted from bottom 50% of high school class
Open	16–21	890–1080	Generally open to all with high school 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 Institution Type

Degree Level/Control	N	Mean (%)	SD*
Two-Year Public	724	58.1	10.1
Two-Year Private	42	64.1	19.6
BA/BS Public	90	65.4	14.4
BA/BS Private	243	71.7	19.1
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Public	170	70.3	10.8
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Private	415	73.5	13.0
PhD Public	241	79.0	10.9
PhD Private	274	81.3	10.8
Total	2199	69.0	NA

*Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 2

First-to-Second-Year Retention Rates: Two-Year Institutions by Admissions Selectivity

Admissions Selectivity	Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	--	--	--	1	57.0	--	1	57.0	--
Selective	3	66.7	18.9	2	48.5	2.1	5	59.4	16.7
Traditional	8	70.9	13.9	12	58.1	14.0	20	63.2	15.0
Liberal	3	63.0	13.2	5	64.0	9.5	8	63.6	10.1
Open	28	62.0	21.8	704	58.1	10.0	732	58.2	10.7
All Reporting Institutions in Column	42	64.1	19.6	724	58.1	10.1	766	58.4	10.9

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 3

First-to-Second-Year Retention Rates: Four-Year Public Institutions by Admissions 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	3	95.7	2.1	5	87.4	10.2	28	93.8	2.7	36	93.1	4.8
Selective	4	83.3	9.5	18	80.8	7.5	64	82.5	13.5	86	82.2	12.2
Traditional	31	71.0	9.5	117	70.7	8.1	143	74.9	7.1	291	72.8	8.1
Liberal	5	73.0	10.7	6	69.3	10.1	4	69.3	2.9	15	70.5	8.6
Open	47	57.4	12.0	24	57.0	10.0	2	72.0	2.8	73	57.7	11.4
All Reporting Institutions in Column	90	65.4	14.4	170	70.3	10.8	241	79.0	10.9	501	73.6	12.8

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 4

First-to-Second-Year Retention Rates: Four-Year Private Institutions by Admissions 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	30	93.1	3.3	18	91.6	4.4	50	94.8	3.2	98	93.7	3.7
Selective	59	82.9	9.0	108	82.0	8.2	83	82.6	7.3	250	82.4	8.1
Traditional	83	66.5	14.2	228	70.8	10.4	124	75.3	8.8	435	71.2	11.2
Liberal	21	61.5	14.4	25	58.7	15.5	9	77.9	14.5	55	62.9	16.2
Open	50	58.4	23.9	36	66.6	16.8	8	78.4	16.4	94	63.2	21.6
All Reporting Institutions in Column	243	71.7	19.1	415	73.5	13.0	274	81.3	10.8	932	75.3	14.8

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 5

Summary Table: National Persistence-to-Degree* Rates by Institution Type

Degree Level/Control	N	Mean (%)	SD
Two-Year Public	355	22.1	15.0
Two-Year Private	17	46.9	32.0
BA/BS Public	49	36.9	20.6
BA/BS Private	149	58.1	25.1
MA/1st Professional Public	140	40.2	18.4
MA/1st Professional Private	296	54.8	16.4
PhD Public	211	52.0	18.3
PhD Private	233	63.1	18.0
Total	1450	46.0	NA

*Completion in three years for associate's degree; five years for BA/BS

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 6

National Persistence-to-Degree Rates: Two-Year Institutions by Admissions Selectivity

		Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Reporting Institutions in Row		
Admissions Selectivity		In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years	In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years	In 2 Years	In 3 Years	In 4 Years
Highly Selective	N =	1	1	1	--	--	--	1	1	1
	Mean (%) =	80.0	85.0	87.0	--	--	--	80.0	85.0	87.0
	SD =	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Selective	N =	1	1	--	1	1	1	2	2	1
	Mean (%) =	71.0	80.0	--	--	--	--	35.5	40.0	--
	SD =	--	--	--	--	--	--	50.2	56.6	--
Traditional	N =	7	4	3	4	5	3	11	9	6
	Mean (%) =	32.6	39.8	40.7	26.8	38.8	39.3	30.5	39.2	40.0
	SD =	27.4	22.5	10.3	28.2	24.3	32.5	26.4	22.0	21.6
Liberal	N =	1	1	1	--	2	--	1	3	1
	Mean (%) =	14.0	18.0	20.0	--	45.0	--	14.0	36.0	20.0
	SD =	--	--	--	--	7.1	--	--	16.4	--
Open	N =	7	10	8	285	347	269	292	357	277
	Mean (%) =	32.4	45.6	44.1	12.4	21.8	25.2	12.8	22.4	25.7
	SD =	33.5	35.4	34.7	11.4	14.7	14.5	12.6	16.0	15.6
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	17	17	13	290	355	273	307	372	286
	Mean (%) =	36.5	46.9	44.8	12.5	22.1	25.2	13.8	23.2	26.1
	SD =	30.6	32.0	30.4	11.8	15.0	14.8	14.5	16.9	16.2

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 7

National Persistence-to-Degree Rates: Four-Year Public Institutions by Degrees Offered and Admissions Selectivity

Admissions Selectivity		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees		
		In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years
Highly Selective	N =	2	2	2	3	3	3	26	24	26
	Mean (%) =	80.5	82.0	83.5	60.0	77.7	80.7	63.3	80.2	82.5
	SD =	2.1	4.2	3.5	13.7	7.5	7.8	15.4	8.0	7.0
Selective	N =	3	3	3	15	15	15	63	61	62
	Mean (%) =	56.0	63.3	67.3	46.5	60.9	63.7	42.4	60.0	64.9
	SD =	32.2	24.1	21.2	16.5	12.7	12.4	18.1	13.8	12.0
Traditional	N =	25	24	26	99	99	102	127	124	129
	Mean (%) =	25.7	38.8	42.8	24.7	39.9	44.1	25.2	42.9	49.3
	SD =	12.3	13.7	15.0	14.6	14.6	14.0	11.5	13.6	12.2
Liberal	N =	5	5	5	5	5	6	3	2	2
	Mean (%) =	21.0	34.4	38.2	31.0	43.2	42.3	50.7	33.0	37.5
	SD =	6.7	9.8	10.4	23.8	20.2	19.8	46.8	22.6	20.5
Open	N =	15	15	17	18	18	19	--	--	--
	Mean (%) =	12.9	23.5	25.5	9.5	17.7	22.7	--	--	--
	SD =	10.7	19.7	21.3	6.5	11.7	13.4	--	--	--
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	50	49	53	140	140	145	219	211	219
	Mean (%) =	25.4	36.9	39.7	26.0	40.2	44.0	35.0	52.0	57.5
	SD =	19.6	20.6	21.5	17.6	18.4	17.8	19.7	18.3	16.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018

Table 8

National Persistence-to-Degree Rates: Four-Year Private Institutions by Degrees Offered and Admissions Selectivity

		Offering Bachelor's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's and Master's Degrees Only			Offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees		
		In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years	In 4 Years	In 5 Years	In 6 Years
Highly Selective	N =	28	28	28	19	19	19	46	44	47
	Mean (%) =	83.0	86.9	87.8	75.6	81.5	83.1	78.7	87.3	89.5
	SD =	8.1	7.1	6.6	9.2	8.5	8.0	13.9	8.2	6.3
Selective	N =	55	52	53	88	86	89	75	74	74
	Mean (%) =	64.1	69.3	70.2	57.6	65.7	67.4	55.9	65.5	67.1
	SD =	16.0	15.1	14.8	13.8	10.7	10.0	12.6	11.7	11.5
Traditional	N =	43	43	46	171	168	177	103	103	106
	Mean (%) =	35.9	44.3	46.1	39.7	48.7	50.8	41.7	52.3	55.1
	SD =	15.9	16.2	16.6	14.4	12.2	12.0	14.0	12.5	11.5
Liberal	N =	7	7	10	12	12	12	4	5	7
	Mean (%) =	27.3	34.3	39.5	29.8	39.2	44.8	34.3	49.4	51.6
	SD =	11.2	10.0	11.1	14.2	13.6	13.0	12.5	13.6	13.9
Open	N =	24	19	17	10	11	13	7	7	7
	Mean (%) =	21.6	24.7	25.1	26.8	35.9	46.5	46.1	55.0	60.1
	SD =	18.3	17.7	15.6	19.4	21.8	21.0	32.2	30.9	30.6
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	157	149	154	300	296	310	235	233	241
	Mean (%) =	51.6	58.1	59.2	46.4	54.8	57.1	53.5	63.1	65.5
	SD =	26.2	25.1	24.4	18.4	16.4	15.6	20.0	18.0	17.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2018