

# 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 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](http://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 2015.
- **Retention rate:** Percent of first-time/full-time students who first enrolled in fall 2015 and were also enrolled in fall 2016 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	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010

These reports are based on data accumulated through June 15, 2017.

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

Selectivity Level	ACT® Test Middle 50%	SAT® Test Middle 50%*	Definition
Highly Selective	25-30	1710-2000	Majority admitted from top 10% of high school class
Selective	21-26	1470-1770	Majority admitted from top 25% of high school class
Traditional	18-24	1290-1650	Majority admitted from top 50% of high school class
Liberal	17-22	1230-1530	Majority admitted from bottom 50% of high school class
Open	16-21	1170-1480	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 Institutional Type**

Degree Level/Control	N	Mean (%)	SD*
Two-Year Public	713	57.4	10.5
Two-Year Private	45	64.6	21.6
BA/BS Public	93	64.5	14.7
BA/BS Private	243	72.6	18.3
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Public	172	69.9	12.1
MA/MS/MBA/1st Professional Private	411	73.4	13.2
PhD Public	243	79.0	10.9
PhD Private	269	81.2	10.8
Total	2189	68.8	NA

\*Standard Deviation

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

## 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	2	93.0	—	1	62.0	—	3	82.7	17.9
Selective	5	85.0	24.0	2	53.0	5.7	7	75.9	25.1
Traditional	8	71.5	18.0	12	57.1	12.2	20	62.9	16.1
Liberal	3	68.7	16.0	5	62.0	10.1	8	64.5	12.0
Open	27	56.3	19.1	693	57.4	10.5	720	57.4	10.9
All Reporting Institutions in Column	45	64.6	21.6	713	57.4	10.5	758	57.9	11.6

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

# 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	3	95.3	2.5	5	87.4	10.2	28	93.8	2.7	36	93.1	4.8
Selective	4	82.8	9.6	18	81.3	6.9	64	82.5	13.5	86	82.3	12.2
Traditional	31	71.2	9.7	117	70.4	8.1	145	74.9	7.1	293	72.7	8.1
Liberal	5	73.0	10.7	7	68.7	10.6	4	70.5	0.6	16	70.5	8.9
Open	50	56.2	11.9	25	55.8	16.6	2	72.0	2.8	77	56.5	13.6
All Reporting Institutions in Column	93	64.5	14.7	172	69.9	12.1	243	79.0	10.9	508	73.2	13.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

## 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 Reporting Institutions in Row		
	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD	N	Mean (%)	SD
Highly Selective	30	93.3	3.2	19	92.2	4.5	49	95.0	3.1	98	93.9	3.6
Selective	61	82.6	9.1	108	81.8	8.5	82	82.6	7.7	251	82.3	8.4
Traditional	82	67.1	12.9	224	71.0	9.9	122	75.4	8.3	428	71.5	10.5
Liberal	20	62.9	12.9	25	59.4	15.2	8	78.5	14.8	53	63.6	15.5
Open	50	60.9	24.4	35	62.9	18.6	8	74.5	18.6	93	62.8	22.1
All Reporting Institutions in Column	243	72.6	18.3	411	73.4	13.2	269	81.2	10.8	923	75.5	14.6

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

## Table 5

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

Degree Level/Control	N	Mean (%)	SD
Two-Year Public	354	22.0	15.0
Two-Year Private	17	46.9	32.0
BA/BS Public	49	36.9	20.6
BA/BS Private	148	57.9	25.1
MA/1st Professional Public	141	40.0	18.4
MA/1st Professional Private	298	54.8	16.4
PhD Public	213	51.9	18.4
PhD Private	231	63.2	18.0
Total	1451	45.9	NA

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

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

# Table 6

**National Persistence-to-Degree Rates: Two-Year Institutions by Level of Selectivity**

		Two-Year Private Institutions			Two-Year Public Institutions			All Reporting Institutions in Row		
		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	346	269	292	356	277
	Mean (%) =	32.4	45.6	44.1	12.4	21.7	25.2	12.9	22.3	25.8
	SD =	33.5	35.4	34.7	11.4	14.6	14.5	12.6	16.0	15.6
All Reporting Institutions in Column	N =	17	17	13	290	354	273	307	371	286
	Mean (%) =	36.5	46.9	44.8	12.5	22.0	25.3	13.9	23.1	26.2
	SD =	30.6	32.0	30.4	11.8	15.0	14.8	14.5	16.9	16.3

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017



# Table 7

**National Persistence-to-Degree Rates: Four-Year Public Institutions by Degrees Offered and Level of 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	64	62	63
	Mean (%) =	56.0	63.3	67.3	46.5	60.9	63.7	42.8	60.3	65.2
	SD =	32.2	24.1	21.2	16.5	12.7	12.4	18.3	13.9	12.1
Traditional	N =	25	24	26	100	99	103	128	125	130
	Mean (%) =	25.7	38.8	42.8	24.4	39.7	44.0	25.0	42.7	49.2
	SD =	12.3	13.7	15.0	14.5	14.8	14.0	11.6	13.7	12.2
Liberal	N =	5	5	5	6	6	7	3	2	2
	Mean (%) =	21.0	34.4	38.2	28.7	40.8	41.1	50.7	33.0	37.5
	SD =	6.7	9.8	10.4	22.0	19.0	18.3	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	142	141	147	221	213	221
	Mean (%) =	25.4	36.9	39.7	25.8	40.0	43.8	35.0	51.9	57.5
	SD =	19.6	20.6	21.5	17.5	18.4	17.7	19.8	18.4	16.5

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017

# Table 8

**National Persistence-to-Degree Rates: Four-Year Private Institutions by Degrees Offered and Level of 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 =	27	27	27	19	19	19	46	44	47
	Mean (%) =	83.3	87.1	88.0	75.6	81.5	83.1	78.7	87.3	89.4
	SD =	8.3	7.3	6.8	9.2	8.5	8.0	13.9	8.2	6.3
Selective	N =	55	52	53	88	86	89	74	73	73
	Mean (%) =	64.1	69.3	70.2	57.6	65.6	67.4	56.2	65.7	67.2
	SD =	16.0	15.1	14.8	13.8	10.7	10.0	12.6	11.7	11.5
Traditional	N =	43	43	46	170	168	177	102	102	105
	Mean (%) =	35.8	44.3	46.1	39.9	48.8	50.9	41.7	52.4	55.2
	SD =	15.9	16.2	16.6	14.4	12.3	12.1	14.2	12.7	11.7
Liberal	N =	7	7	10	14	14	14	4	5	7
	Mean (%) =	27.3	34.3	39.5	30.3	39.2	44.4	34.3	49.4	51.6
	SD =	11.2	10.0	11.1	14.0	13.6	12.9	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 =	156	148	153	301	298	312	233	231	239
	Mean (%) =	51.4	57.9	59.1	46.4	54.8	57.1	53.6	63.2	65.6
	SD =	26.2	25.1	24.4	18.4	16.4	15.6	20.0	18.0	17.4

Source: ACT Institutional Data File, 2017