

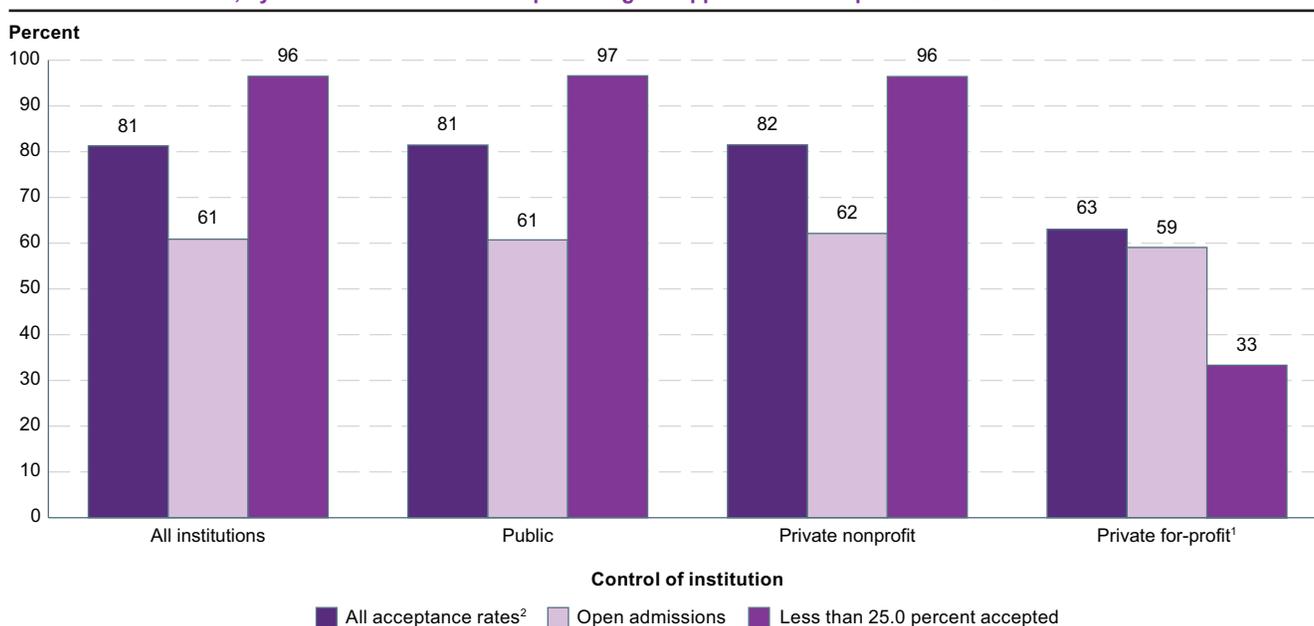
## Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates

About 63 percent of students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2013 completed that degree at the same institution within 6 years; the 6-year graduation rate was higher for females than for males (66 vs. 60 percent).

Retention rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall, and graduation rates measure the percentage of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who complete their program at the same institution within a specified period of time. This indicator

examines how retention and graduation rates for first-time, full-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students vary among different types of postsecondary institutions. It also examines how graduation rates have changed over time and how they differ between male and female students.

**Figure 1. Percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students retained at 4-year degree-granting institutions, by control of institution and percentage of applications accepted: 2018 to 2019**



<sup>1</sup> This retention rate for private for-profit institutions with acceptance rates of less than 25.0 percent is calculated from an adjusted cohort of three students.

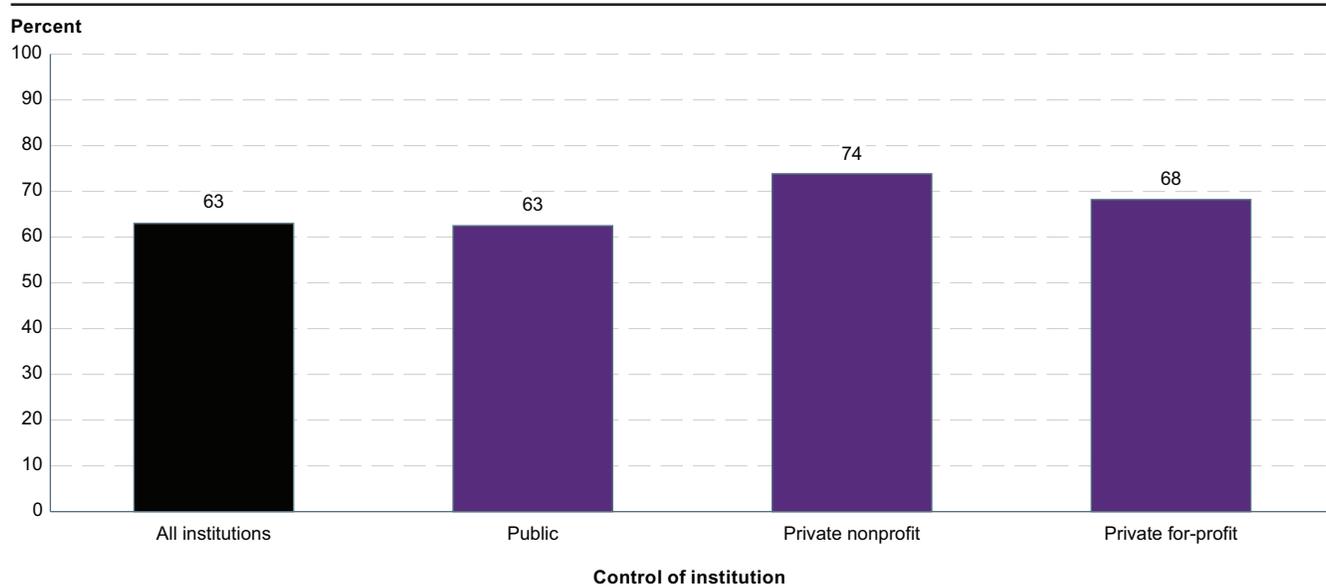
<sup>2</sup> Includes institutions that have an open admissions policy, institutions that have various applicant acceptance rates, and institutions for which no acceptance rate information is available.

NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data shown represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are derived from adjusted entry cohorts, which are based on first-time bachelor's degree-seeking students and exclude students who died or were totally and permanently disabled, served in the armed forces (including those called to active duty), served with a foreign aid service of the federal government (e.g., Peace Corps), or served on official church missions. Retained first-time undergraduate students are those who returned to the institutions to continue their studies the following fall. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment component; and Fall 2018, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 326.30.

For first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2018, the overall retention rate in fall 2019 was 81 percent. Retention rates were highest at the most selective institutions (i.e., those with acceptance rates of less than 25 percent) for both public and private nonprofit institutions. At public 4-year institutions, the retention rate was 81 percent overall, 97 percent at the most

selective institutions, and 61 percent at the least selective institutions (i.e., those with an open admissions policy). Similarly, the retention rate at private nonprofit 4-year institutions was 82 percent overall, 96 percent at the most selective institutions, and 62 percent at the least selective institutions. The retention rate at private for-profit 4-year institutions was 63 percent overall.

**Figure 2. Percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students retained at 2-year degree-granting institutions, by control of institution: 2018 to 2019**

NOTE: Data are for 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data shown represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. At 2-year institutions, retained students include students who re-enrolled at the institution in the following fall term (i.e., returning students) and those who completed their program of study during the following fall term (i.e., a degree/certificate program that takes less than 2 years). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

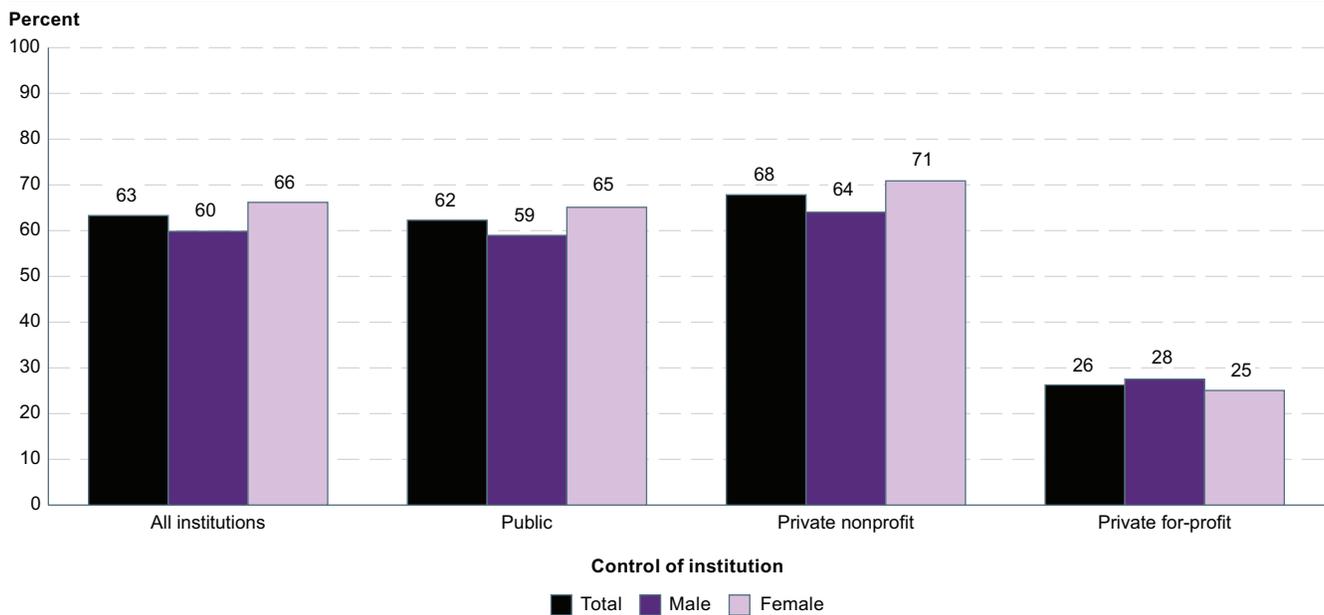
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2020, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 326.30.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions, the overall retention rate in fall 2019 for first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered in fall 2018 was 63 percent. The retention rate in fall 2019 for public 2-year institutions (63 percent) was lower than the retention rates for private for-profit (68 percent) and private nonprofit (74 percent) 2-year institutions.

The 1990 Student Right-to-Know Act requires postsecondary institutions to report the percentage of

full-time degree/certificate-seeking students who complete their program within 150 percent of the normal time for completion (e.g., within 6 years for students seeking a 4-year bachelor's degree). The graduation rates in this indicator are based on this measure. Students who transfer without completing a degree are counted as noncompleters in the calculation of these rates, regardless of whether they complete a degree at another institution. In addition to graduation rates, this indicator presents information on transfer rates at 2-year institutions.

**Figure 3. Graduation rate within 150 percent of normal time (within 6 years) for degree completion from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by control of institution and sex: Cohort entry year 2013**



NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates include students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institution of attendance only.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2019–20, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 326.10.

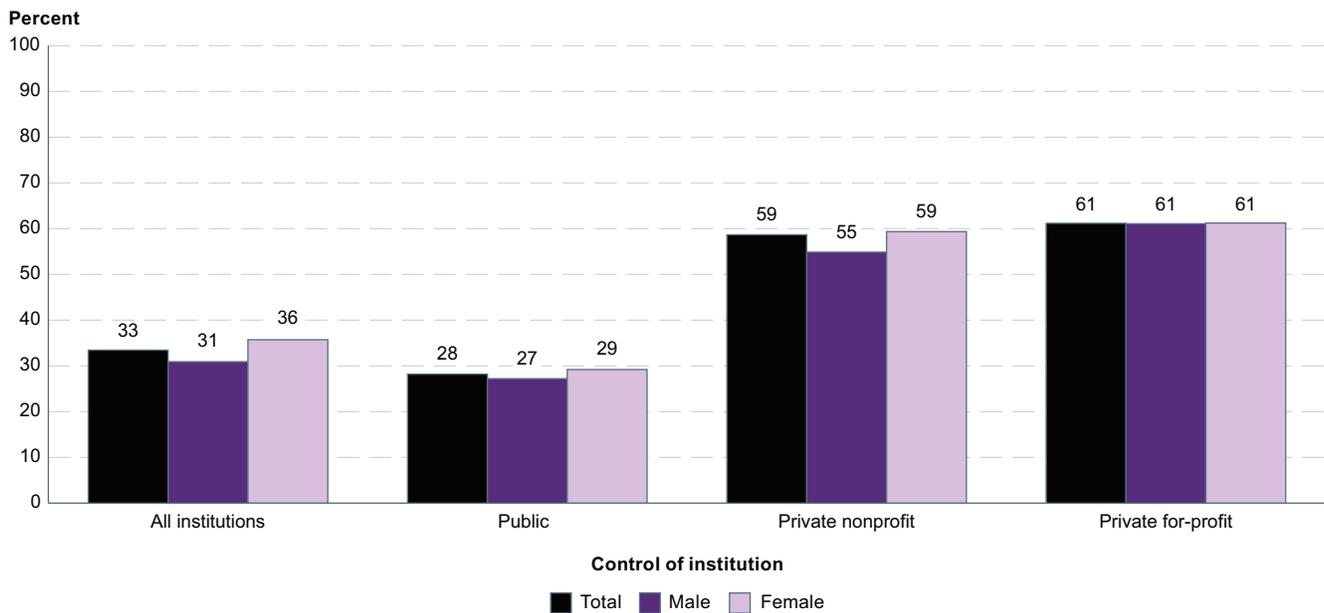
In 2019, the overall 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2013 was 63 percent. That is, by 2019, some 63 percent of students had completed a bachelor's degree at the same institution where they started in 2013. The 6-year graduation rate was 62 percent at public institutions, 68 percent at private nonprofit institutions, and 26 percent at private for-profit institutions. The overall 6-year graduation rate was 60 percent for males and 66 percent for females; it was higher for females than for males at both public (65 vs. 59 percent) and private nonprofit (71 vs. 64 percent) institutions. However, at private for-profit institutions, males had a higher 6-year graduation rate than females (28 vs. 25 percent).

Six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2013 varied according to institution selectivity. In particular, 6-year graduation rates were highest at institutions that were the most selective (i.e., those with acceptance rates

of less than 25 percent) and were lowest at institutions that were the least selective (i.e., those with an open admissions policy). For example, at 4-year institutions with an open admissions policy, 29 percent of students completed a bachelor's degree within 6 years. At 4-year institutions with acceptance rates of less than 25 percent, the 6-year graduation rate was 89 percent.

Between 2010 and 2019, the overall 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions increased by 5 percentage points, from 58 percent (for students who began their studies in 2004 and graduated within 6 years) to 63 percent (for students who began their studies in 2013 and graduated within 6 years). During this period, 6-year graduation rates increased from 56 to 62 percent at public institutions and from 65 to 68 percent at private nonprofit institutions but decreased from 29 to 26 percent at private for-profit institutions. Also, from 2010 to 2019, the 6-year graduation rate for males increased from 56 to 60 percent, and the rate for females increased from 61 to 66 percent.

**Figure 4. Graduation rate within 150 percent of normal time for degree completion from first institution attended for first-time, full-time degree/certificate-seeking students at 2-year postsecondary institutions, by control of institution and sex: Cohort entry year 2016**



NOTE: Data are for 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates include students receiving associate's degrees or certificates from their initial institution of attendance only. An example of completing a credential within 150 percent of the normal time is completing a 2-year degree within 3 years. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2019–20, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 326.20.

The missions of 2-year institutions generally focus on providing student instruction and related activities through a range of career-oriented programs at the certificate and associate's degree levels and preparing students to transfer to 4-year institutions. At 2-year degree-granting institutions overall, 33 percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in fall 2016 attained it within 150 percent of the normal time required for completion of these programs (an example of completing a credential within 150 percent of the normal time is completing a 2-year degree within 3 years). In addition, after 150 percent of the normal time required for the completion of a program at a 2-year degree-granting institution, 14 percent of students had transferred to another institution.<sup>1</sup> The remaining students who entered 2-year institutions in 2016 either remained enrolled in their first institution after 150 percent of the normal time (11 percent) or were no longer enrolled in their first institution and had not been reported as a transfer at a different institution (41 percent).

For first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree at 2-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2016, the graduation rate within 150 percent of the normal time required for

the completion of a program was 28 percent at public institutions, 59 percent at private nonprofit institutions, and 61 percent at private for-profit institutions. In addition, 17 percent of students at public 2-year institutions had transferred to a different institution, compared with 2 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions and less than 1 percent at private for-profit 2-year institutions. The percentage of students who remained enrolled in their first institution was 13 percent at public 2-year institutions and 2 percent at both private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions. At public 2-year institutions, the percentage of students who had not graduated from their first institution, were no longer enrolled in their first institution, and had not been reported as a transfer at a different institution was 42 percent; the percentage at both private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions was 37 percent.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions overall, the 150 percent graduation rate was higher for females than for males (36 vs. 31 percent). The 150 percent graduation rate was also higher for females than males at public (29 vs. 27 percent) and private nonprofit (59 vs. 55 percent) 2-year institutions. At private for-profit 2-year institutions, females and males had similar graduation rates (both 61 percent).

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Transfer out data are required to be reported only by those institutions for which preparation for transfers is a substantial part of the institutional mission.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 326.10, 326.20, 326.25, and 326.30

**Related indicators and resources:** [Educational Attainment of Young Adults](#); [First-Time Postsecondary Students' Persistence After 3 Years](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]; [Postsecondary Certificates and Degrees Conferred](#); [Postsecondary Graduation Rates](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Postsecondary Outcomes for Nontraditional Undergraduate Students](#) [*The Condition of Education 2019 Spotlight*]

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**Glossary:** Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Certificate; Degree-granting institutions; Full-time enrollment; Open admissions; Postsecondary education; Postsecondary institutions (basic classification by level); Private institution; Public school or institution; Retention rate; Undergraduate students