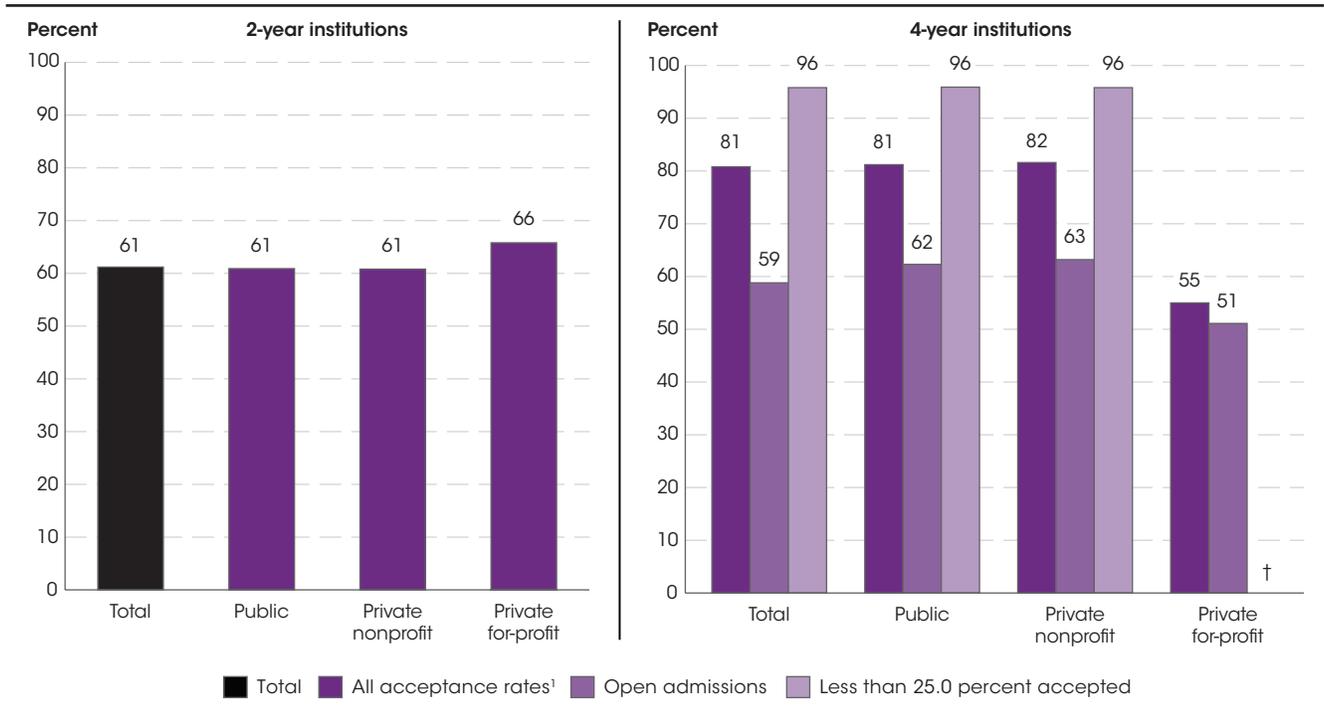


# Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates

About 59 percent of students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2009 completed that degree within 6 years; the graduation rate was higher for females than for males (62 percent vs. 56 percent).

Figure 1. Percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduates retained at 2- and 4-year degree-granting institutions, by institution level, control of institution, and acceptance rate: 2014 to 2015



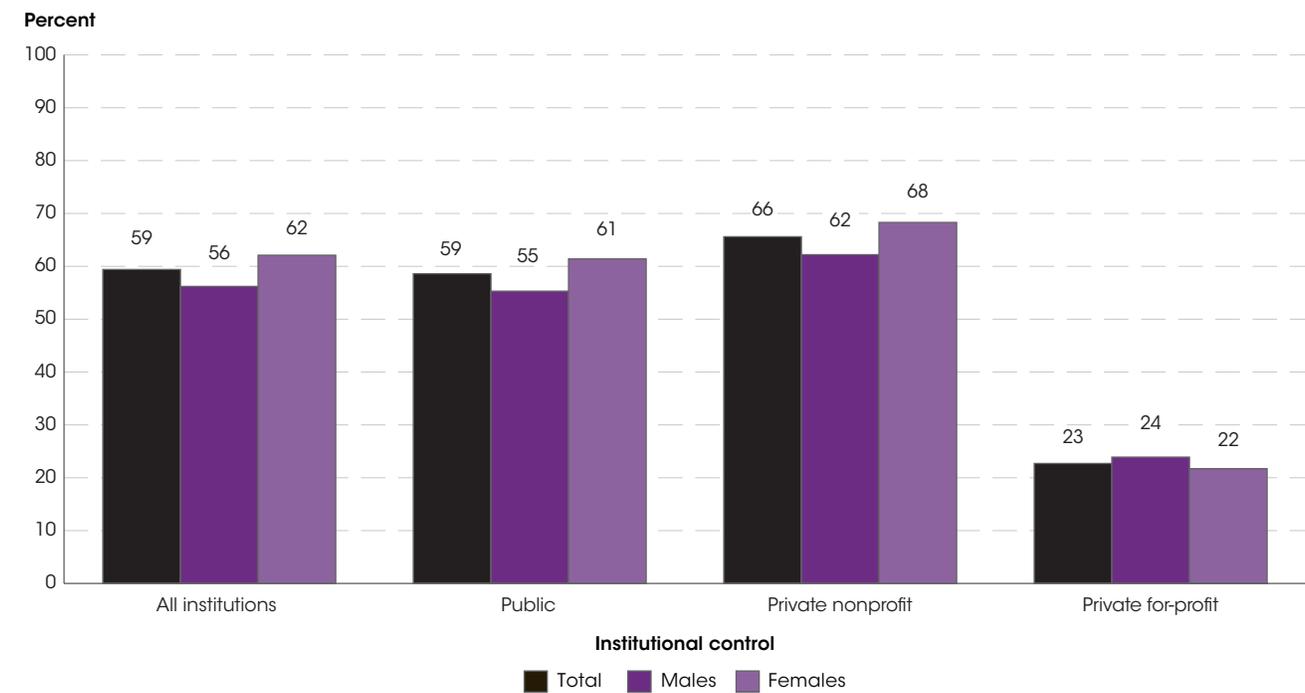
† Not applicable.  
<sup>1</sup> Includes institutions that have an open admission policy, institutions that have various applicant acceptance rates, and institutions for which no acceptance rate information is available.  
 NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Retained first-time undergraduates 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 estimates.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2016, Fall Enrollment component; and Fall 2014, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 326.30.

The retention rate (i.e., the percentage of students returning the following fall) among first-time, full-time degree-seeking students who enrolled at 4-year degree-granting institutions in 2014 was 81 percent. Retention rates were higher at institutions that were more selective, regardless of institutional control (public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit). At public 4-year institutions, the overall retention rate was 81 percent; at the least selective institutions (i.e., those with open admissions) the retention rate was 62 percent, while at the most selective institutions (i.e., those that accept less than 25 percent of applicants) the retention rate was 96 percent. The retention rate for private nonprofit 4-year institutions was 82 percent overall, ranging from 63 percent at institutions with open admissions to 96 percent at institutions that accept less than 25 percent of applicants. The retention rate for private for-profit 4-year institutions was 55 percent overall, ranging from 51 percent at institutions with open admissions to 76 percent at

institutions that accept between 25 and 50 percent of applicants. In 2014 and 2015, no students attended private for-profit institutions with an acceptance rate under 25 percent. At 2-year institutions, the overall retention rate for students was 61 percent; at this institution level, the retention rate for private for-profit institutions (66 percent) was higher than for both private nonprofit and public institutions (61 percent each).

The 1990 Student Right-to-Know Act requires postsecondary institutions to report the percentage of students who complete their program within 150 percent of the normal time for completion (e.g., within 6 years for students pursuing a 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.

**Figure 2. Graduation rate within 150 percent of normal time (within 6 years) 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 2009**



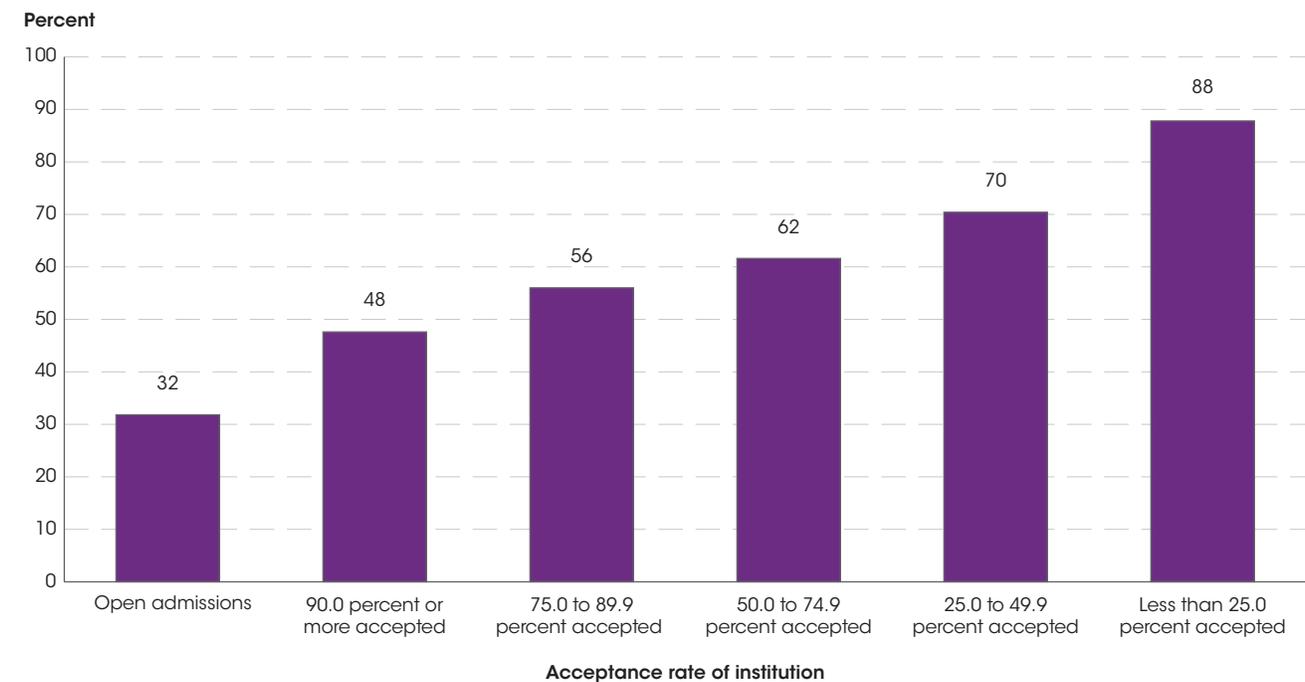
NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates include students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institution of attendance only. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2015–16, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 326.10.

The 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2009 was 59 percent. That is, 59 percent had completed a bachelor's degree by 2015 at the same institution where they started in 2009. The 6-year graduation rate was 59 percent at public institutions, 66 percent at private

nonprofit institutions, and 23 percent at private for-profit institutions. The 6-year graduation rate was 62 percent for females and 56 percent for males; it was higher for females than for males at both public (61 vs. 55 percent) and private nonprofit institutions (68 vs. 62 percent). However, at private for-profit institutions, males had a higher 6-year graduation rate than females (24 vs. 22 percent).

**Figure 3. Graduation rate within 150 percent of normal time (within 6 years) from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by acceptance rate of institution: Cohort entry year 2009**



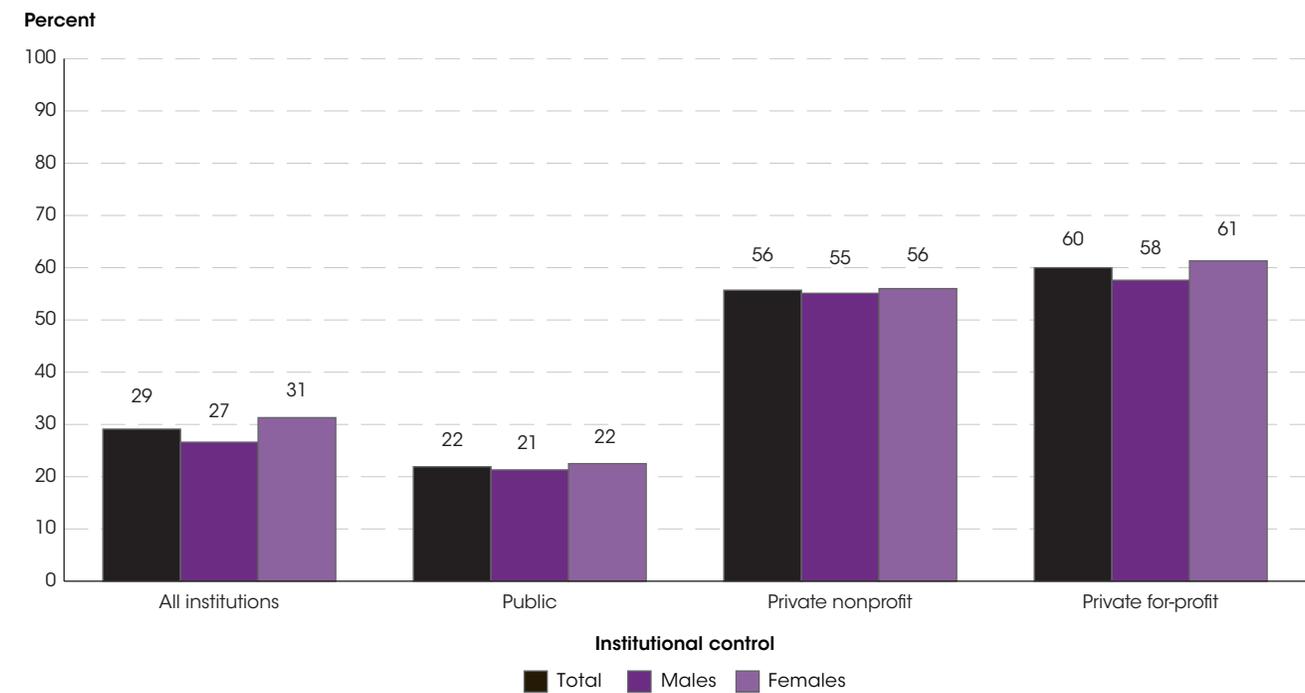
NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates include students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institution of attendance only.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2015–16, Graduation Rates component and Fall 2009, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 326.10.

Six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in fall 2009 varied according to institutional selectivity. In particular, 6-year graduation rates were highest at institutions that were the most selective (i.e., had the lowest admissions acceptance rates) and were lowest at institutions that were the least selective (i.e., had open admissions policies). For example, at 4-year institutions with open admissions policies, 32 percent of students completed a bachelor's degree within 6 years. At 4-year institutions where the acceptance rate was less than 25 percent of applicants, the 6-year graduation rate was 88 percent.

Between 2010 and 2015, the overall 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time students who began seeking

a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions increased by 1 percentage point, from 58 percent (for students who began their studies in 2004 and graduated within 6 years) to 59 percent (for students who began their studies in 2009 and graduated within 6 years). During this period, 6-year graduation rates were higher in 2015 than in 2010 at public institutions (59 vs. 56 percent) and private nonprofit institutions (66 vs. 65 percent), but lower at private for-profit institutions (23 vs. 29 percent). In addition, the 6-year graduation rate for females increased during this period (from 61 to 62 percent), and the 6-year graduation rate for males was approximately 1 percentage point higher (56 percent in both years).

**Figure 4. Graduation rate within 150 percent of normal time 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 2012**



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 estimates. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2015–16, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 326.20.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions, 29 percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in fall 2012 attained it within 150 percent of the normal time required for these programs (an example of completing a credential within 150 percent of the normal time is completing a 2-year degree within 3 years). This graduation rate was 22 percent at public 2-year institutions, 56 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions, and 60 percent at

private for-profit 2-year institutions. At 2-year institutions overall, as well as at public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit 2-year institutions, the graduation rates were higher for females than for males. At private for-profit 2-year institutions, for example, 61 percent of females versus 58 percent of males who began pursuing a certificate or associate's degree in 2012 completed it within 150 percent of the normal time required.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, tables 326.10, 326.20, 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*]

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