

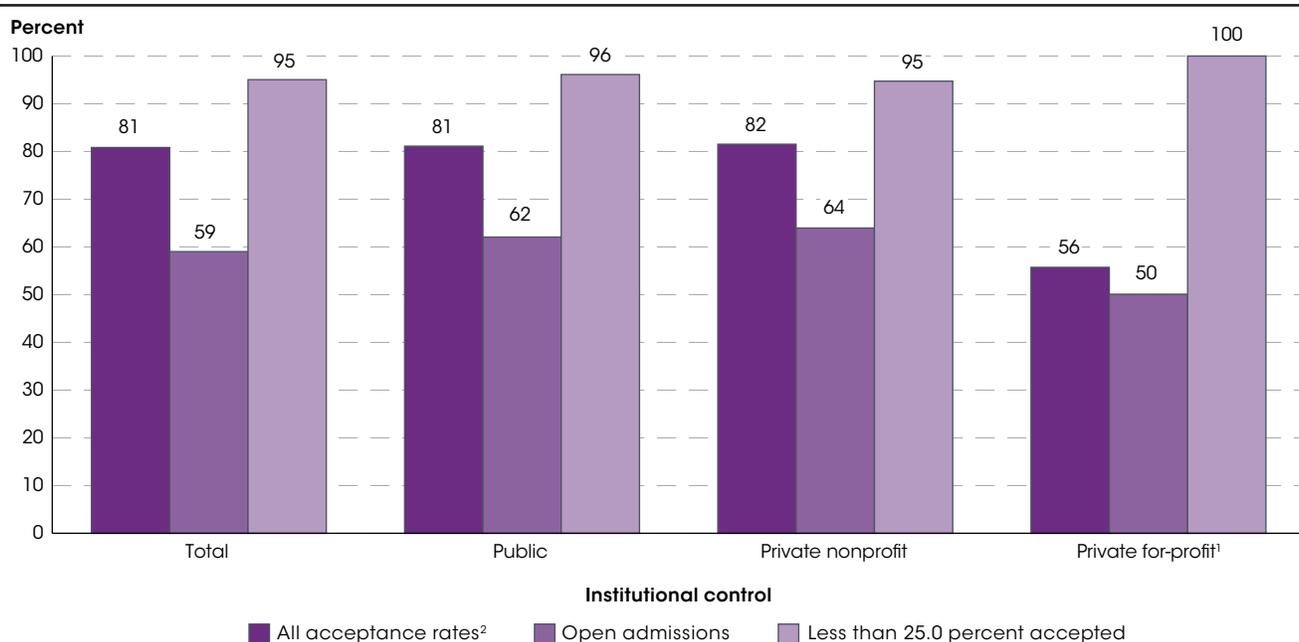
Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates

About 60 percent of students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2010 completed that degree within 6 years; the 6-year graduation rate was higher for females than for males (63 vs. 57 percent).

Retention rates measure the percentage of first-time, full-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 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 undergraduates retained at 4-year degree-granting institutions, by control of institution and acceptance rate: 2015 to 2016



¹ The 100 percent retention rate for private for-profit institutions with acceptance rates of less than 25.0 percent is calculated from an adjusted cohort of eight students.

² 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.

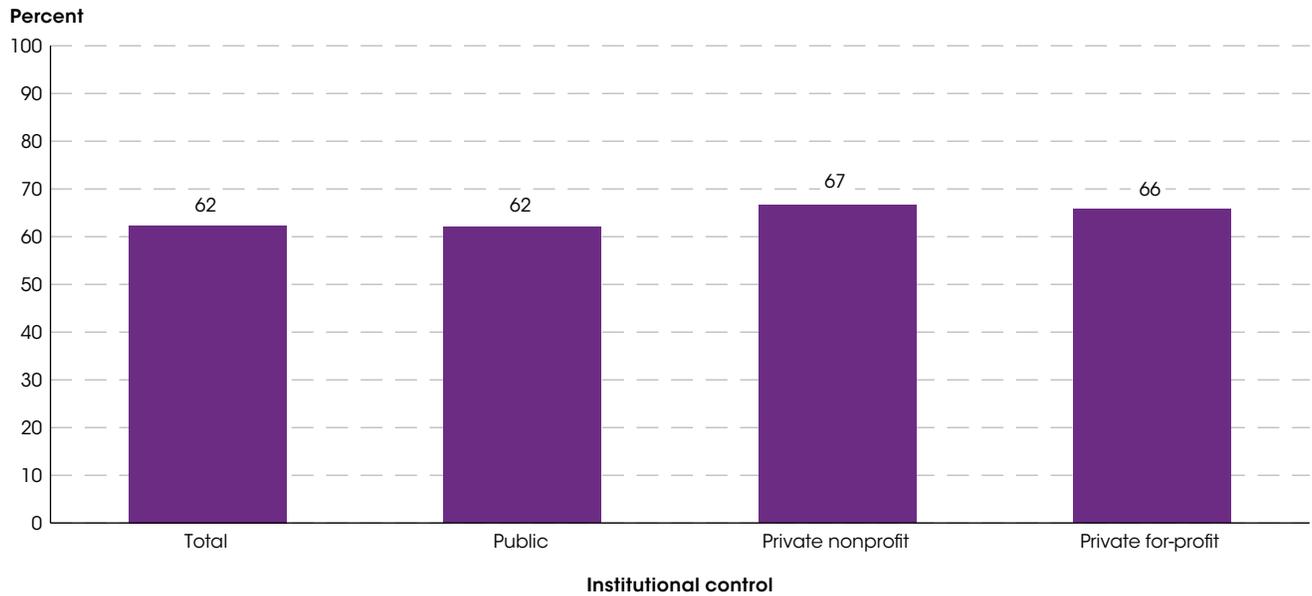
NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Retained first-time undergraduates are those who returned to the institutions to continue their studies the following fall. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2017, Fall Enrollment component; and Fall 2015, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 326.30.

For first-time, full-time degree-seeking students who enrolled at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2015, the retention rate (i.e., the percentage of students returning the following fall) was 81 percent. Retention rates were higher at institutions that were more selective (i.e., those with lower admission acceptance rates), regardless of institutional control (public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit). At public 4-year institutions overall, the retention rate was 81 percent. At the least selective public institutions (i.e., those with open admissions), the retention rate was 62 percent,

and at the most selective public institutions (i.e., those that accept less than 25 percent of applicants), the retention rate was 96 percent. Similarly, the retention rate for private nonprofit 4-year institutions overall was 82 percent, ranging from 64 percent at institutions with open admissions to 95 percent at institutions that accept less than 25 percent of applicants. The retention rate for private for-profit 4-year institutions overall was 56 percent, ranging from 50 percent at institutions with open admissions to 100 percent at institutions that accept less than 25 percent of applicants.¹

Figure 2. Percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduates retained at 2-year degree-granting institutions, by control of institution: 2015 to 2016



NOTE: Data are for 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Returning students data for 2-year institutions include returning students, plus students who completed their program. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates.

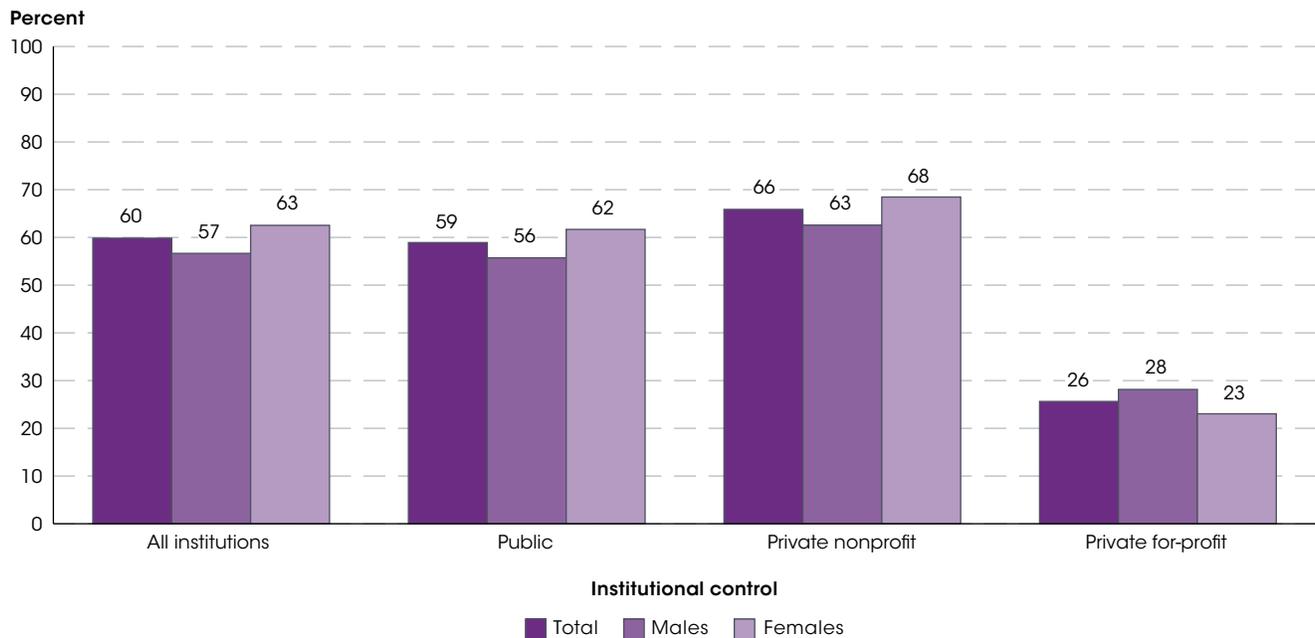
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2017, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 326.30.

At 2-year institutions, the overall retention rate for first-time, full-time students was 62 percent. The retention rates for private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions (67 and 66 percent, respectively) were higher than the rate for public institutions (62 percent).

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 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 2010



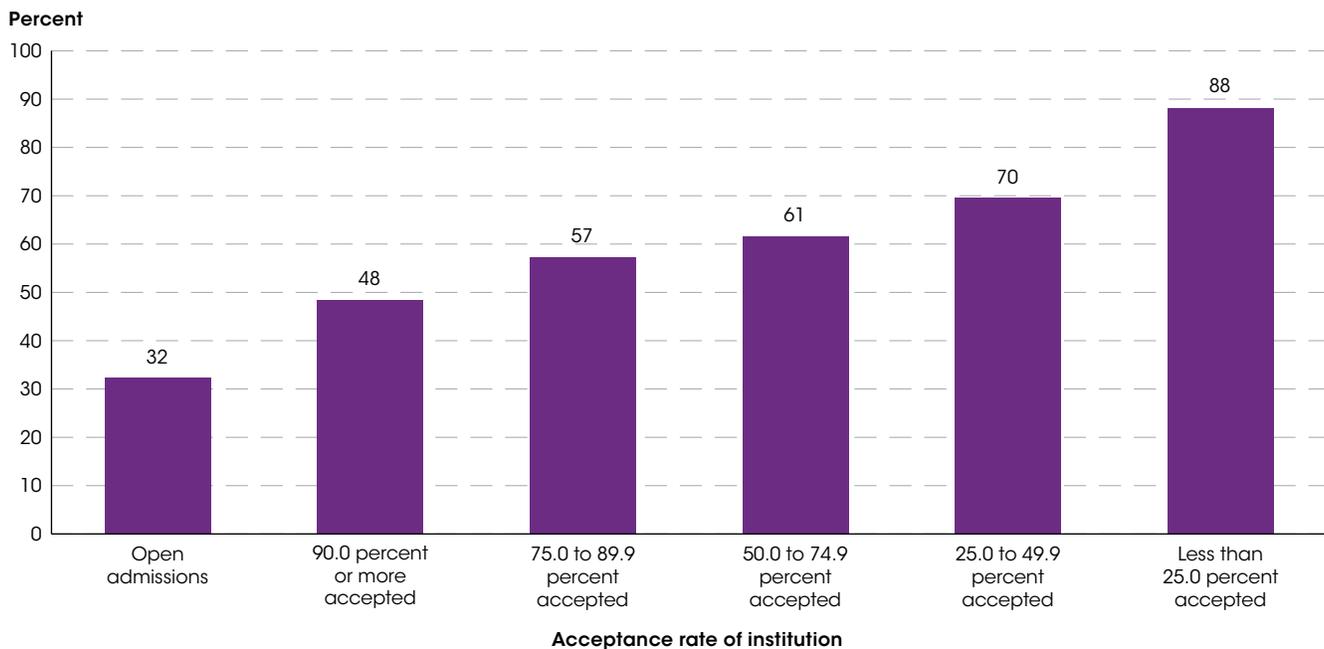
NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates include students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institution of attendance only. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based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

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2016–17, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 326.10.

The 6-year graduation rate (150 percent 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 2010 was 60 percent. That is, by 2016 some 60 percent of students had completed a bachelor's degree at the same institution where they started in 2010. The 6-year graduation rate was 59 percent at public institutions, 66 percent at private nonprofit institutions,

and 26 percent at private for-profit institutions. The 6-year graduation rate was 63 percent for females and 57 percent for males; it was higher for females than for males at both public (62 vs. 56 percent) and private nonprofit (68 vs. 63 percent) institutions. However, at private for-profit institutions, males had a higher 6-year graduation rate than females (28 vs. 23 percent).

Figure 4. 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 acceptance rate of institution: Cohort entry year 2010



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.

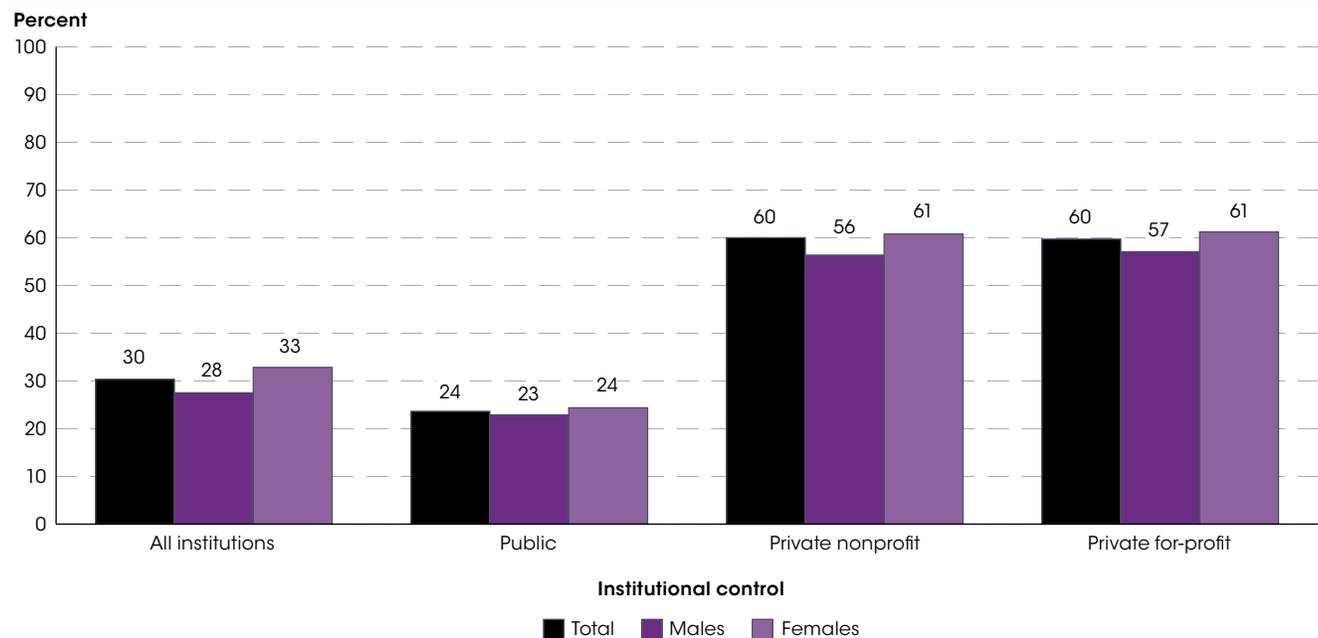
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2016–17, Graduation Rates component, and Fall 2010, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 326.10.

Six-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree in fall 2010 varied according to institutional selectivity. In particular, 6-year graduation rates were highest at institutions that were the most selective (i.e., those that accepted less than 25 percent of applicants) and were lowest at institutions that were the least selective (i.e., those that 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 2011 and 2016, 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 59 percent (for students who began their studies in 2005 and graduated within 6 years) to 60 percent (for students who began their studies in 2010 and graduated within 6 years). During this period, 6-year graduation rates were higher in 2016 than in 2011 at public institutions (59 vs. 57 percent) and private nonprofit institutions (66 vs. 65 percent), but lower in 2016 than in 2011 at private for-profit institutions (26 vs. 29 percent). In addition, the 6-year graduation rate was 2 percentage points higher in 2016 (63 percent) than in 2011 (61 percent) for females and was 1 percentage point higher in 2016 (57 percent) than in 2011 (56 percent) for males.

Figure 5. 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 2013



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 2016–17, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 326.20.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions overall, 30 percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in fall 2013 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). The graduation rate was 24 percent at public 2-year institutions and 60 percent at both private nonprofit

and 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 57 percent of males who began pursuing a certificate or associate's degree in 2013 completed it within 150 percent of the normal time required for completion.

Endnotes:

¹ The 100 percent retention rate for private for-profit institutions is calculated from an adjusted cohort of eight students.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, 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*]; [Postsecondary Graduation Rates](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]

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