

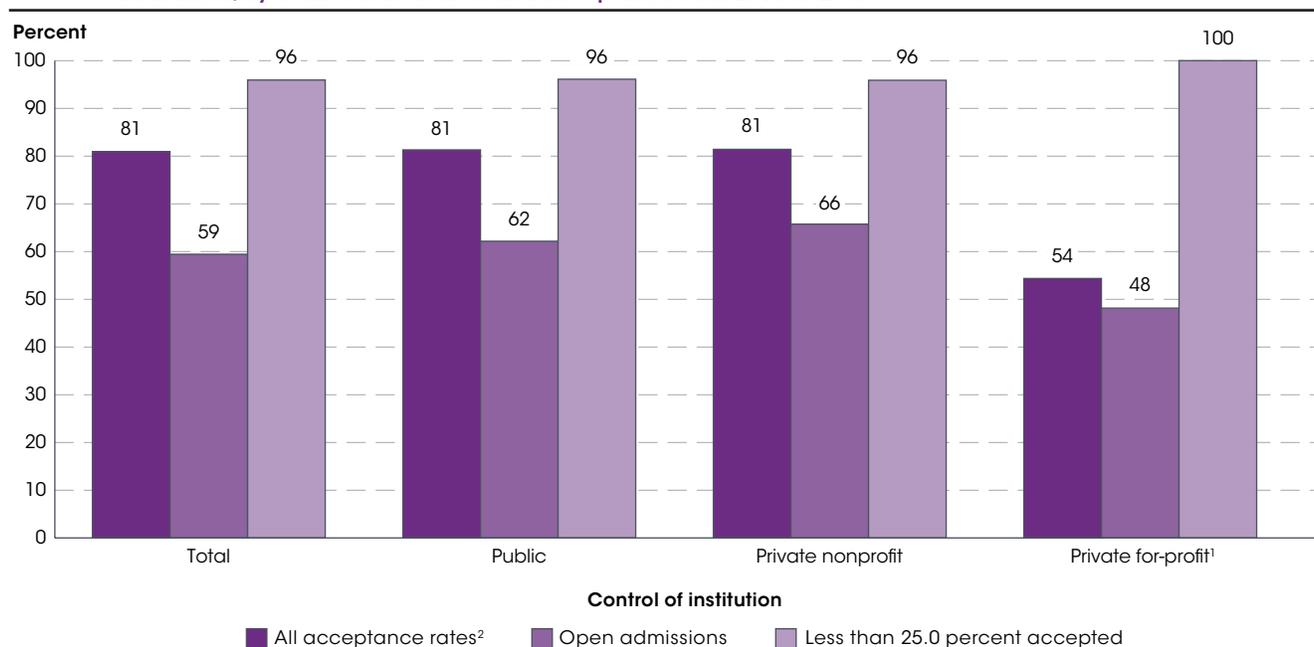
Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates

About 60 percent of students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2011 completed that degree at the same institution 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 undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall, and graduation rates measure the percentage of first-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 acceptance rate: 2016 to 2017



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 one student.

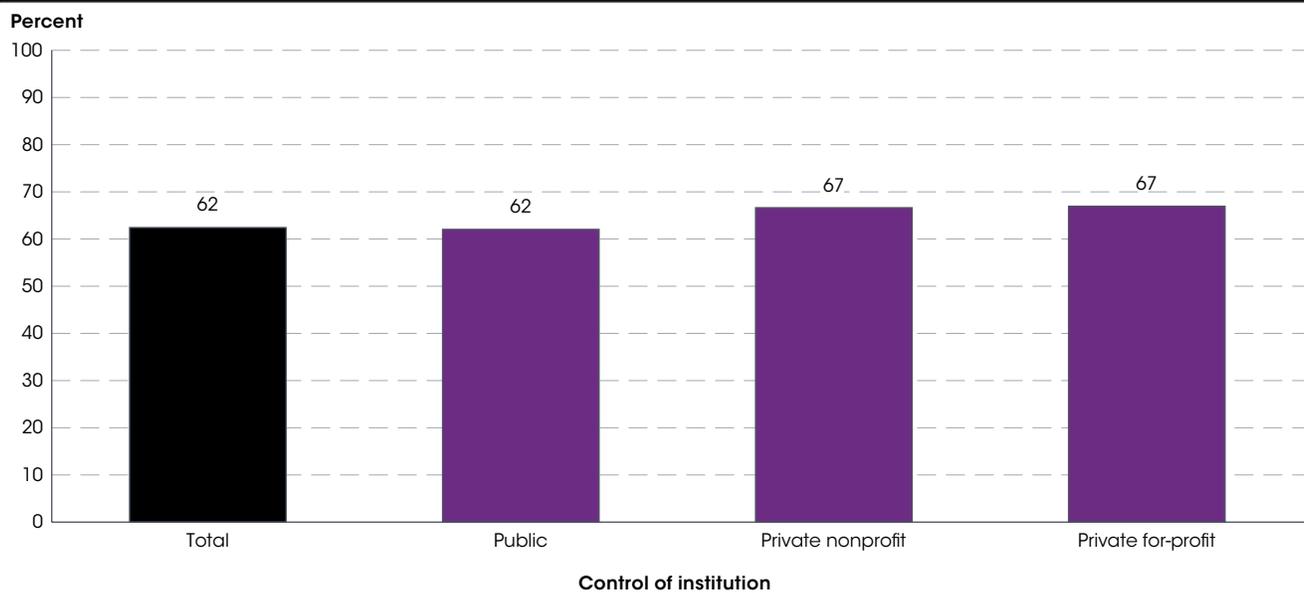
² Includes institutions that have an open admissions policy, institutions that have various applicant acceptance rates, and institutions for which no acceptance rate information is available.

NOTE: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Retained first-time 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 2018, Fall Enrollment component; and Fall 2016, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.30.

For first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who enrolled in 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2016, the retention rate was 81 percent. Retention rates were highest at the most selective institutions (i.e., those with acceptance rates of less than 2 percent), for public and private nonprofit institutions. At public 4-year institutions overall, the retention rate was 81 percent. At the least selective public institutions (i.e., those with an open admissions policy), the retention

rate was 62 percent, and at the most selective public institutions (i.e., those with acceptance rates of less than 25 percent), the retention rate was 96 percent. Similarly, the retention rate for private nonprofit 4-year institutions overall was 81 percent, ranging from 66 percent at institutions with an open admissions policy to 96 percent at institutions with acceptance rates of less than 25 percent. The retention rate for private for-profit 4-year institutions overall was 54 percent.

Figure 2. Percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students retained at 2-year degree-granting institutions, by control of institution: 2016 to 2017

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 data.

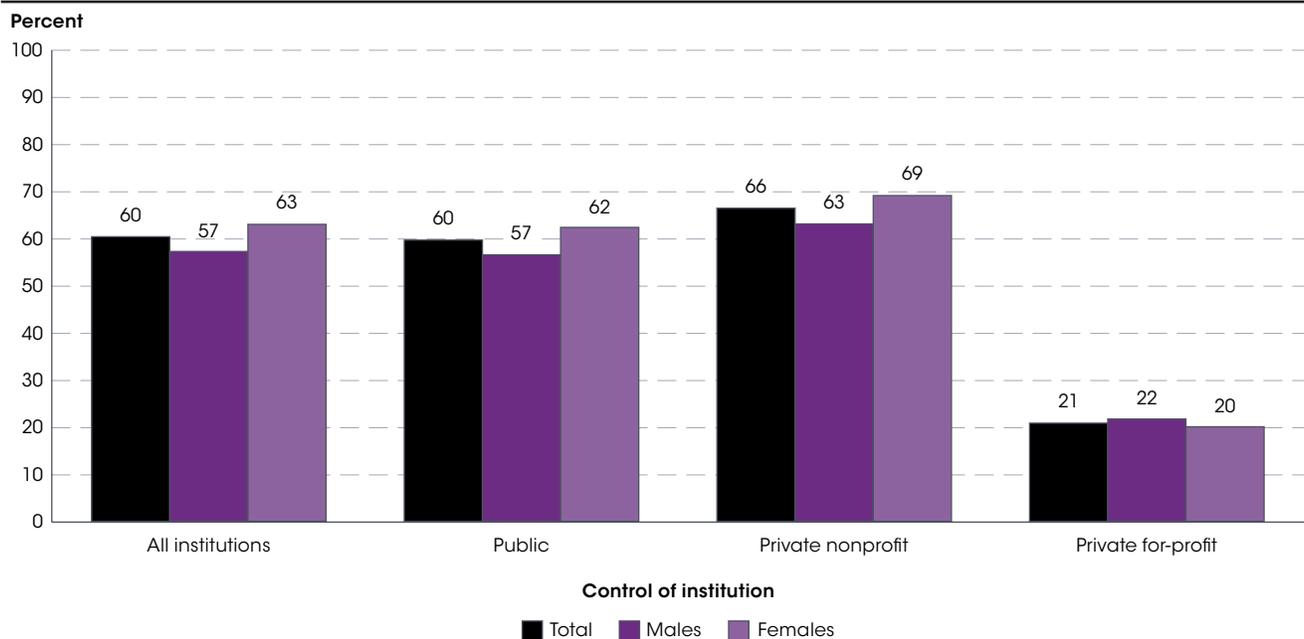
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.30.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions in 2016, the overall retention rate for first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students was 62 percent. The retention rate for public 2-year institutions (62 percent) was lower than the retention rates for private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions (67 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 seeking 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. For additional context, 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 2011



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 data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2017–18, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.10.

The 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 2011 overall was 60 percent. That is, by 2017 some 60 percent of students had completed a bachelor's degree at the same institution where they started in 2011.

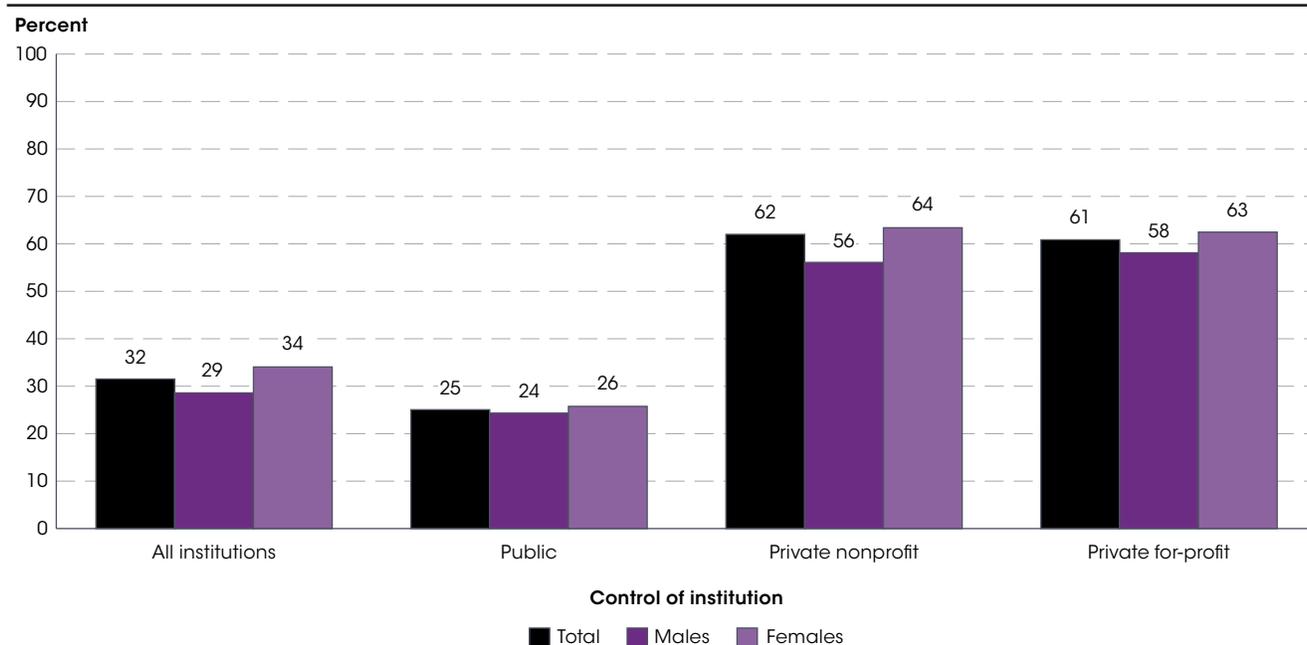
The 6-year graduation rate was 60 percent at public institutions, 66 percent at private nonprofit institutions, and 21 percent at private for-profit institutions. The overall 6-year graduation rate was 63 percent for females and 57 percent for males; it was higher for females than for males at both public (62 vs. 57 percent) and private nonprofit (69 vs. 63 percent) institutions. However, at private for-profit institutions, males had a higher 6-year graduation rate than females (22 vs. 20 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 2011 varied according to institutional 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, 31 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 87 percent.

Between 2010 and 2017, 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 2 percentage points, from 58 percent (for students who began their studies in 2004 and graduated within 6 years) to 60 percent (for students who began their studies in 2011 and graduated within 6 years). During this period, 6-year graduation rates increased by 4 percentage points at public institutions (from 56 to 60 percent) and by 1 percentage point at private nonprofit institutions (from 65 to 66 percent) but decreased by 8 percentage points at private for-profit institutions (from 29 to 21 percent). Also from 2010 to 2017, the 6-year graduation rate for males increased from 56 to 57 percent and the rate for females increased from 61 to 63 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 2014



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 2017–18, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 326.20.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions overall, 32 percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in fall 2014 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, 15 percent of students had transferred to another institution, 12 percent remained enrolled in their first institution, and 41 percent were no longer enrolled in their first institution and had not been reported as a transfer at a different institution.

For first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in fall 2014, the graduation rate within 150 percent of the normal time required for the completion of a program was 25 percent at public 2-year institutions, 62 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions, and 61 percent at private for-profit 2-year institutions. In addition, 18 percent of students at public 2-year institutions had transferred to a different

institution, compared with 3 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions and 1 percent at private for-profit 2-year institutions. The percentage of students who remained enrolled in their first institution was 14 percent at public 2-year institutions, 22 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions, and 2 percent at private for-profit 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 44 percent for public 2-year institutions, 13 percent for private nonprofit 2-year institutions, and 36 percent for 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 150 percent graduation rates were higher for females than for males. At private for-profit 2-year institutions, for example, 63 percent of females versus 58 percent of males who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree in 2014 completed it within 150 percent of the normal time required for completion.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 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*]

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