

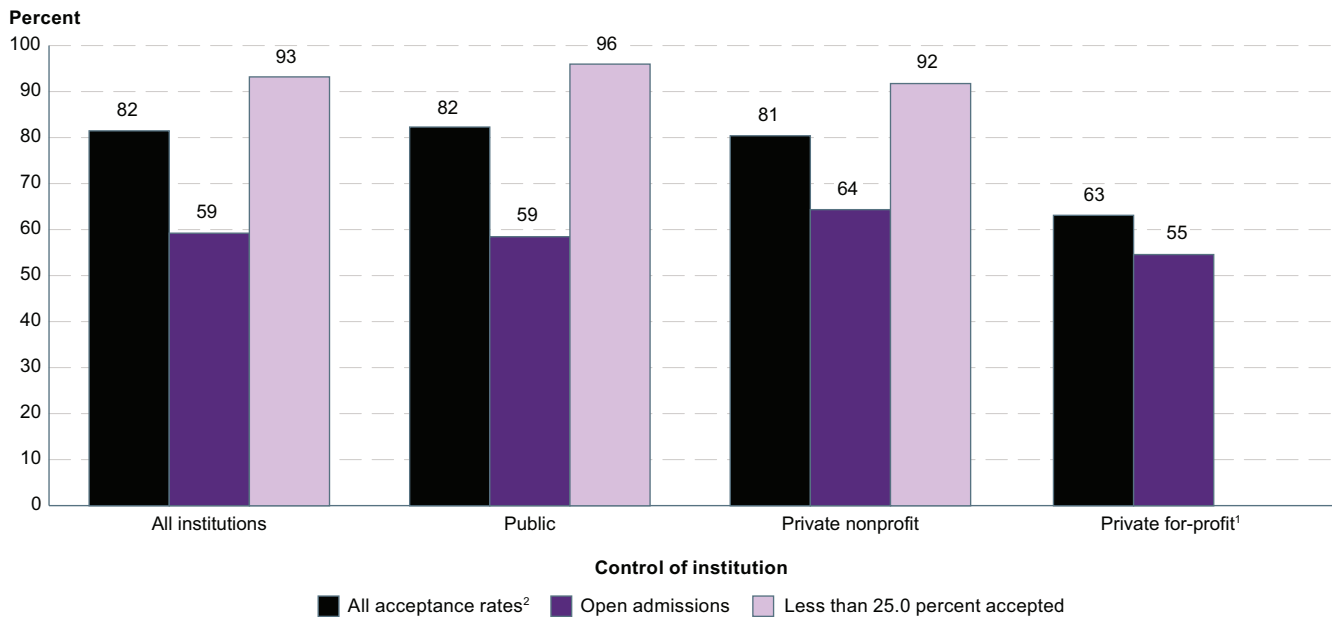
# Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates

*Sixty-four percent of students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2014 completed that degree at the same institution within 6 years. The 6-year graduation rate was higher for females than for males (67 vs. 60 percent).*

Retention rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall. 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: 2019 to 2020**



<sup>1</sup> In 2020, a total of five private for-profit institutions had acceptance rates of less than 25.0 percent. Due to a small adjusted cohort size, the retention rate for these institutions is excluded.

<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.

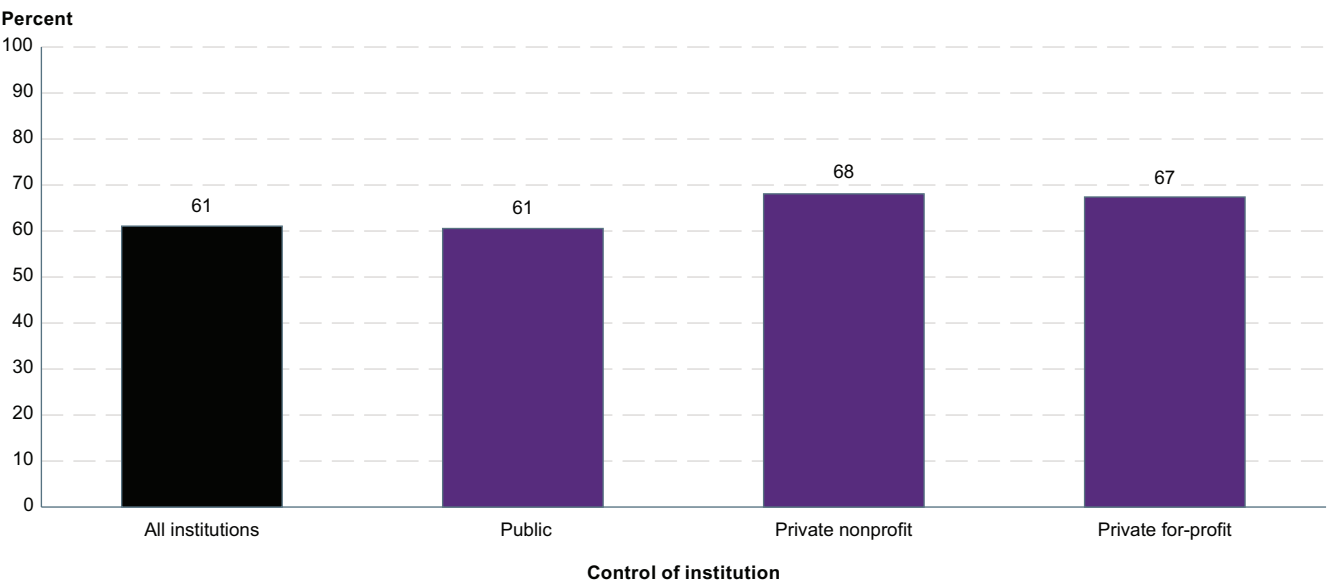
NOTE: Data shown represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data are derived from adjusted entry cohorts, which exclude students who died or were totally and permanently 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. Entry cohorts in this figure are based on first-time bachelor's degree-seeking students. Retained first-time undergraduate students include 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 2021, Fall Enrollment component; and Fall 2019, Institutional Characteristics component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 326.30.

For first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2019, the overall retention rate in fall 2020 was 82 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 82 percent overall, 96 percent at the most

selective institutions, and 59 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 81 percent overall, 92 percent at the most selective institutions, and 64 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: 2019 to 2020



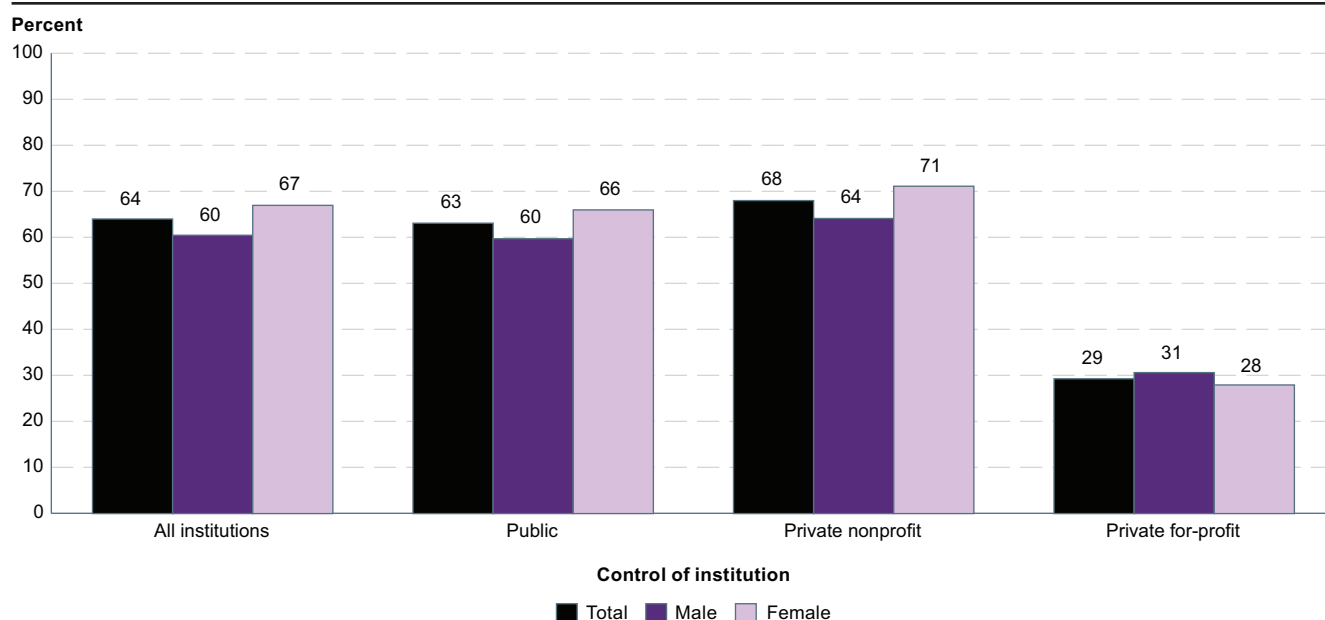
NOTE: Data shown represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Data are derived from adjusted entry cohorts, which exclude students who died or were totally and permanently 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 students include students who re-enrolled at the institution in the following fall term or completed their degree/certificate by the following fall term (e.g., short-term certificate 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 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 326.30.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions, the overall retention rate in fall 2020 for first-time, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who entered in fall 2019 was 61 percent. The retention rate for public 2-year institutions (61 percent) was lower than the retention rates for private nonprofit (68 percent) and private for-profit (67 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 their first degree/certificate program are counted as noncompleters in the calculation of these rates, regardless of whether they complete a degree/certificate program 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 2014**



NOTE: Data shown represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates refer to students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institutions 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 2020–21, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 326.10.

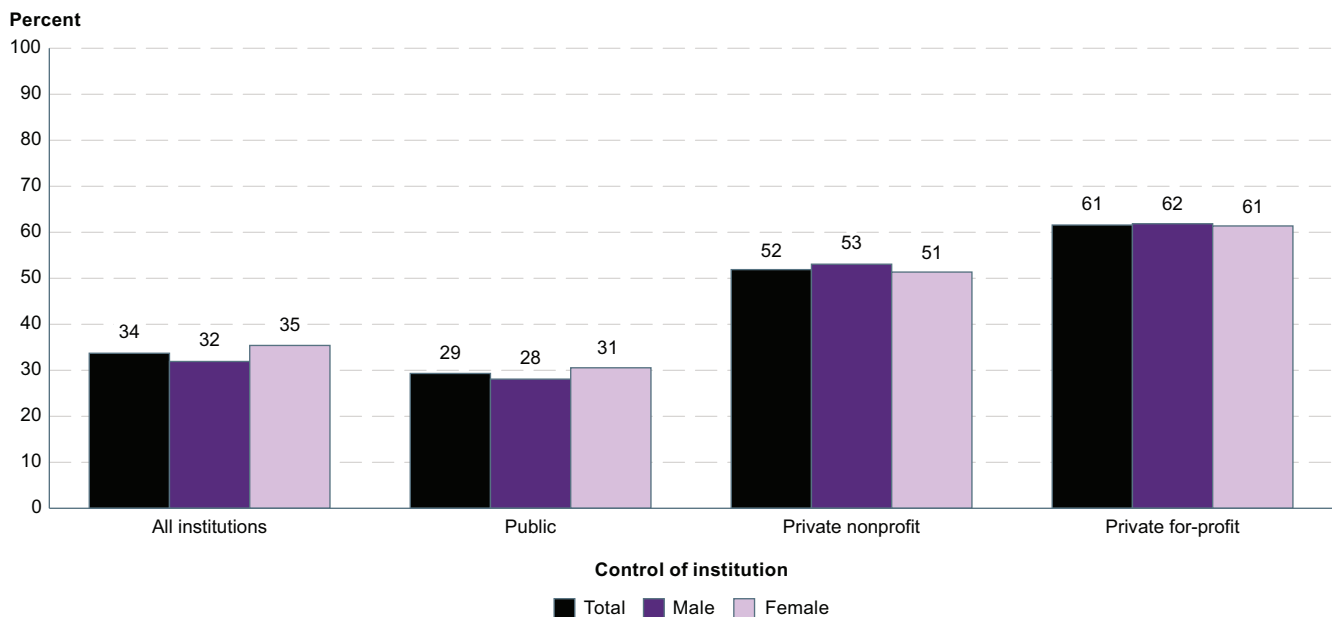
In 2020, the overall 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2014 was 64 percent. That is, by 2020, some 64 percent of students had completed a bachelor's degree at the same institution where they started in 2014. The 6-year graduation rate was 63 percent at public institutions, 68 percent at private nonprofit institutions, and 29 percent at private for-profit institutions. The overall 6-year graduation rate was 60 percent for males and 67 percent for females. The 6-year graduation rate was higher for females than for males at both public (66 vs. 60 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 (31 vs. 28 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 2014 varied according to institution selectivity. In particular, 6-year graduation rates were highest at the most selective institutions (i.e., those with acceptance rates of less than

25 percent) and lowest at the least selective institutions (i.e., those with an open admissions policy). For example, at 4-year institutions with an open admissions policy, 28 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 90 percent.

Between 2010 and 2020, 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 increased overall. This 6-year graduation rate increased from 58 percent (for students who began their studies in 2004) to 64 percent (for students who began their studies in 2014). During this period, 6-year graduation rates increased from 56 to 63 percent at public institutions and from 65 to 68 percent at private nonprofit institutions. At private for-profit institutions, the 6-year graduation rate was 29 percent in both 2010 and 2020, and it fluctuated in the intervening years. Also, from 2010 to 2020, the 6-year graduation rate for males increased from 56 to 60 percent, and the rate for females increased from 61 to 67 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 2017**



NOTE: Data shown represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are for 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates refer to students receiving associate's degrees or certificates from their initial institutions 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 2020–21, Graduation Rates component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 326.20.

Two-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. Among first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a certificate or associate's degree at 2-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2017, about 34 percent attained their credential 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. Among the same cohort, another 14 percent had transferred to another institution within 150 percent of normal completion time.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, 10 percent remained enrolled in their first institution after 150 percent time. The remaining students who entered 2-year institutions in 2017 were no longer enrolled in their first institution and had not been reported as a transfer at a different institution (42 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 2017, the graduation rate within 150 percent of the normal time required for completion of a program was 29 percent at public institutions, compared with 52 percent at private nonprofit institutions and 61 percent at private for-profit institutions. In contrast, public 2-year institutions had the highest percentages of students who had transferred to a different institution and

students who were still enrolled in their first institution after 150 percent time. Specifically, 16 percent of students at public 2-year institutions had transferred to a different institution, compared with 4 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions and 1 percent at private for-profit 2-year institutions. Additionally, 12 percent of students at public 2-year institutions were still enrolled at their first institution, compared with 3 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions and 2 percent at 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 43 percent. This percentage was 41 percent at private nonprofit 2-year institutions and 36 percent at private for-profit 2-year institutions.

At 2-year degree-granting institutions, the graduation rate within 150 percent of normal completion time varied by no more than 4 percentage points between male and female students. Overall, this graduation rate was higher for females than for males (35 vs. 32 percent). Additionally, the 150 percent graduation rate was higher for females than for males at public 2-year institutions (31 vs. 28 percent). However, the 150 percent graduation rate was higher for males than females at private nonprofit (53 vs. 51 percent) and private for-profit (62 vs. 61 percent) 2-year institutions.

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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 institution's mission.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, 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