

2017 Student Retention Indicators: Benchmarks for First-Year, Second-Year, and Transfer Students



Benchmarks of term-to-term persistence rates, progression rates, and retention for public and private, two-year and four-year institutions, based on a poll of campus officials

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FTIC = First Time in College first-year students

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This report focuses on full-time, degree-seeking undergraduates. Poll respondents were instructed to report “completers/graduates” as persisters. Community and technical colleges were instructed to include certificate-seeking students in addition to students seeking any type of associate or bachelor’s degree.

PERSISTENCE BENCHMARKS

Persistence is defined as term-to-term return. For the tables in this section, each percentage was calculated based on the enrollment of the previous term.

TABLE 1: FTIC TERM-TO-TERM PERSISTENCE RATE BENCHMARKS (BASED ON 2015-16 FTIC COHORT)

Persistence Ratios		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Persistence from term one to term two, 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	86.0%	85.0%	91.3%	83.5%	79.0%
	Median	90.0%	89.0%	94.5%	88.5%	82.0%
	75th Percentile	93.0%	91.0%	95.0%	93.3%	86.0%
<hr/>						
Persistence from term two of the 2015-16 academic year to term three (the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year, i.e., the students' second year)	25th Percentile	78.0%	75.0%	86.0%	77.8%	70.0%
	Median	84.0%	81.0%	89.0%	82.0%	74.0%
	75th Percentile	88.0%	85.0%	90.0%	88.3%	76.0%

Note: Term One is normally the Fall Term and Term Two is normally called either the Winter Term or Spring Term.



What factors are influencing your institution's college completion outcomes for particular groups of students? This report helps to answer this question.

SELECTIVITY DEFINITION

Selectivity for four-year private institutions in this study was based on dividing the pool of private institution respondents in half after identifying the median ACT for this sector's data set. Higher selectivity = institutions with ACT > 23. Lower selectivity = institutions with ACT ≤ 23. These levels were defined based on median composite ACT scores from IPEDS or the equivalent in SAT using a concordance table from the College Board.

TABLE 2: SECOND-YEAR UNDERGRADUATE TERM-TO-TERM PERSISTENCE RATE BENCHMARKS
(BASED ON 2015-16 SECOND-YEAR COHORT)

Persistence Ratios		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Persistence from term one to term two, 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	91.0%	89.5%	94.0%	91.0%	84.0%
	Median	94.0%	92.0%	96.0%	94.0%	86.5%
	75th Percentile	96.0%	95.0%	97.0%	95.0%	89.8%
Persistence from term two of the 2015-16 academic year to term three (the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year, i.e., the students' third year)	25th Percentile	87.0%	85.0%	92.8%	90.0%	56.0%
	Median	91.0%	89.0%	94.0%	92.0%	63.0%
	75th Percentile	94.0%	93.0%	96.3%	94.0%	77.0%

TABLE 3: NEWLY-ARRIVED TRANSFER STUDENT TERM-TO-TERM PERSISTENCE RATE BENCHMARKS
(BASED ON 2015-16 NEW TRANSFER STUDENT COHORT)

Persistence Ratios		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Persistence from term one to term two, 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	84.0%	83.3%	89.0%	82.5%	73.8%
	Median	89.0%	87.5%	91.0%	89.5%	76.5%
	75th Percentile	92.0%	91.0%	94.0%	91.8%	85.3%
Persistence from term two of the 2015-16 academic year to term three (the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year)	25th Percentile	80.3%	80.0%	85.8%	82.3%	53.5%
	Median	85.0%	84.0%	89.0%	84.0%	63.0%
	75th Percentile	90.8%	89.8%	92.0%	86.8%	70.0%

Reminder: poll respondents were instructed to report completers/graduates as persisters.

TABLE 4: RETURNING TRANSFER STUDENT TERM-TO-TERM PERSISTENCE RATE BENCHMARKS
(BASED ON 2015-16 RETURNING TRANSFER COHORT)

Persistence Ratios		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Persistence from term one to term two, 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	89.0%	89.0%	92.0%	90.0%	75.5%
	Median	94.0%	94.0%	94.0%	92.0%	80.0%
	75th Percentile	97.0%	97.0%	96.0%	94.3%	86.8%
Persistence from term two of the 2015-16 academic year to term three (the beginning of the 2016-17 academic year)	25th Percentile	69.8%	68.8%	73.5%	74.0%	50.0%
	Median	83.5%	81.0%	92.0%	81.0%	61.0%
	75th Percentile	94.0%	93.0%	96.8%	90.0%	82.0%

USE BENCHMARKS TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT SUCCESS AND COLLEGE COMPLETION

Use the benchmarks in this study to:

- Increase the accuracy of persistence predictions;
- Set more realistic goals and subgoals for persistence and completion for specific subpopulations; and
- Identify specific strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for student success and completion.

PROGRESSION BENCHMARKS

Progression is defined as any activity that correlates with persistence, such as course completion and academic probation rates.

TABLE 5: FTIC CREDIT HOURS ATTEMPTED VS. CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED IN TERM ONE, 2015-16 ACADEMIC YEAR

Progression Metrics		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Credit hours attempted	25th Percentile	14.5	14.4	14.8	14.0	13.1
	Median	15.0	15.0	15.3	14.9	13.8
	75th Percentile	15.6	15.6	15.8	15.1	14.2
Credit hours completed	25th Percentile	13.0	12.5	14.0	12.6	10.2
	Median	14.0	13.4	14.5	13.0	10.9
	75th Percentile	14.7	14.4	15.0	13.8	11.7
Ratio of credit hours completed to credit hours attempted	25th Percentile	0.90	0.87	0.92	0.86	0.75
	Median	0.92	0.91	0.94	0.89	0.81
	75th Percentile	0.94	0.94	0.97	0.93	0.84

TABLE 6: FTIC CREDIT HOURS ATTEMPTED VS. CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED IN TERM TWO, 2015-16 ACADEMIC YEAR

Progression Metrics		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Credit hours attempted	25th Percentile	14.7	14.4	14.9	14.4	12.0
	Median	15.1	15.0	15.6	14.7	13.1
	75th Percentile	15.7	15.7	15.9	15.0	13.7
Credit hours completed	25th Percentile	13.2	12.6	14.0	12.5	9.0
	Median	14.4	14.0	14.6	13.3	10.1
	75th Percentile	14.9	14.8	15.1	14.1	10.9
Ratio of credit hours completed to credit hours attempted	25th Percentile	0.90	0.89	0.93	0.86	0.73
	Median	0.93	0.92	0.94	0.91	0.78
	75th Percentile	0.96	0.95	0.96	0.94	0.83

TABLE 7: PROPORTIONS OF FTIC STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC PROBATION AT END OF TERM ONE VS. END OF TERM TWO, 2015-16 ACADEMIC YEAR

Progression Metrics		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC*	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
		ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
Proportion of students on probation at end of term one, 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	4.5%	5.0%	2.0%	N/A	1.8%
	Median	9.0%	10.0%	5.5%	N/A	11.5%
	75th Percentile	14.5%	16.0%	9.3%	N/A	23.8%
Proportion of students on probation at end of term two, 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	3.0%	4.0%	3.0%	N/A	6.0%
	Median	7.0%	8.5%	4.0%	N/A	10.5%
	75th Percentile	11.5%	12.0%	7.0%	N/A	16.0%

*No benchmarks are available for four-year public institutions due to the limited number of campuses that reported data.

ABOUT THE STATISTICAL PROCESS USED IN THIS STUDY

See lists of responding institutions on pages 12 and 13. All of the figures in the report are judged to be statistically significant. This determination was made by calculating each finding’s statistical significance (e.g., means, medians, proportions, and other relevant test statistics) and then judging the confidence interval to be acceptably small relative to the size of the finding.

WHY DO WE REPORT THE 25TH AND 75TH PERCENTILES?

The quartiles are provided to make comparisons more precise for readers. For example, the quartiles show that the middle 50 percent of respondents from all four-year private institutions (the first column of Table 7) reported the proportion of students on probation at the end of term one was between 4.5 percent (the 25th percentile) and 14.5 percent (the 75th percentile). In addition, one can observe that 25 percent of respondents in the data set were below 4.5 percent and 25 percent of respondents in the data set were above 14.5 percent.

RETENTION BENCHMARKS

Retention is defined as fall to fall return. The percentage is calculated based on the size of the original cohort.

TABLE 8: FTIC FALL-TO-FALL RETENTION RATE BENCHMARKS FROM FALL 2015 TO FALL 2016
(BASED ON 2015-16 FTIC COHORT)

Retention Ratios	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
	ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
25th Percentile	69.0%	62.8%	80.0%	65.0%	55.3%
Median	76.0%	71.0%	84.0%	74.0%	61.0%
75th Percentile	82.0%	78.0%	87.0%	82.0%	67.0%

TABLE 9: SECOND-YEAR UNDERGRADUATES' FALL-TO-FALL RETENTION RATE BENCHMARKS FROM FALL 2015 TO FALL 2016
(BASED ON 2015-16 SECOND-YEAR COHORT)

Retention Ratios	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
	ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
25th Percentile	80.8%	78.0%	87.0%	81.8%	52.3%
Median	86.5%	84.0%	90.0%	87.0%	58.0%
75th Percentile	90.0%	87.0%	93.0%	90.0%	69.0%

Please note that due to rounding, the retention rates shown in Tables 8-11 may vary slightly from the persistence rates shown in Tables 1-4.

TABLE 10: NEWLY-ARRIVED TRANSFER STUDENT FALL-TO-FALL RETENTION RATE BENCHMARKS FROM FALL 2015 TO FALL 2016 (BASED ON 2015-16 NEW TRANSFER STUDENT COHORT)

Retention Ratios	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
	ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
25th Percentile	68.0%	66.0%	76.0%	69.5%	39.3%
Median	77.0%	75.0%	81.0%	77.0%	49.0%
75th Percentile	82.0%	80.0%	85.0%	79.0%	57.0%

TABLE 11: RETURNING TRANSFER STUDENT FALL-TO-FALL RETENTION RATE BENCHMARKS FROM FALL 2015 TO FALL 2016 (BASED ON 2015-16 RETURNING TRANSFER STUDENT COHORT)

Retention Ratios	FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE			FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
	ALL	INSTITUTIONS WITH LOWER SELECTIVITY	INSTITUTIONS WITH HIGHER SELECTIVITY	ALL	ALL
25th Percentile	67.3%	63.5%	71.5%	73.0%	37.0%
Median	78.5%	75.0%	90.0%	75.0%	48.0%
75th Percentile	91.5%	89.0%	95.0%	91.0%	68.0%

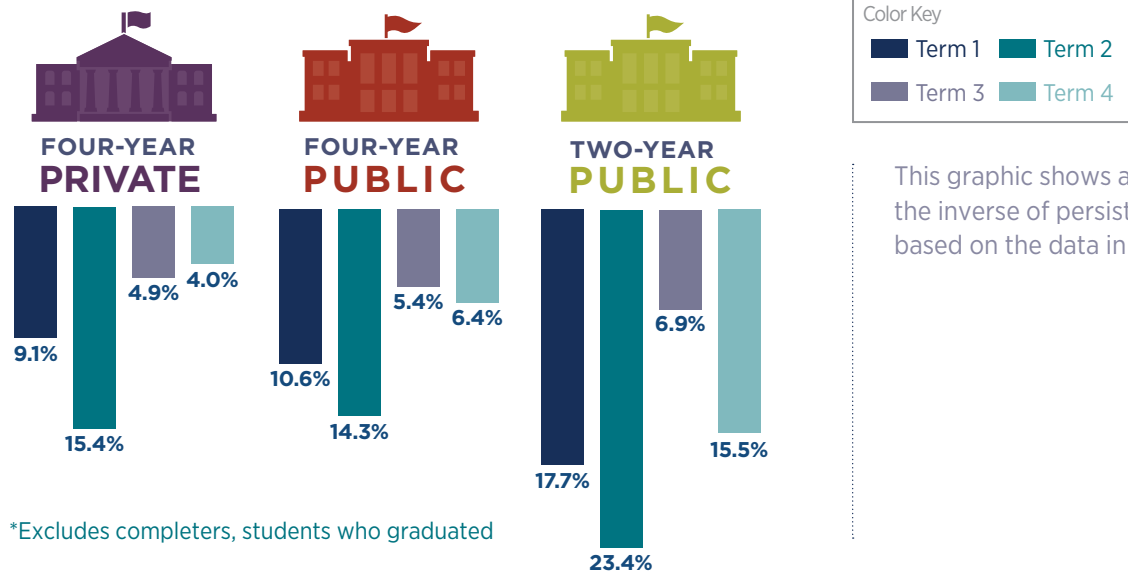
LONGITUDINAL VIEW

Each percentage is calculated based on the original cohort size.

TABLE 12: LONGITUDINAL VIEW FOR FTIC STUDENTS: CONTINUING ENROLLMENT, TERMS ONE TO FIVE
(BASED ON 2014-15 FTIC COHORT)

Continuation Rates		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Persistence from term one to term two, 2014-15 academic year	25th Percentile	87.0%	83.8%	78.4%
	Median	90.9%	89.4%	82.3%
	75th Percentile	94.9%	94.8%	86.2%
Persistence from term two of the 2014-15 academic year to term three (first term of 2015-16 academic year)	25th Percentile	67.9%	62.2%	53.7%
	Median	75.5%	75.1%	58.8%
	75th Percentile	83.0%	84.6%	68.4%
Persistence from term three to term four of 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	62.4%	56.5%	45.9%
	Median	70.6%	69.7%	52.0%
	75th Percentile	79.4%	81.1%	58.4%
Persistence from term four of the 2015-16 academic year to term five (first term of 2016-17 academic year)	25th Percentile	55.8%	51.5%	25.9%
	Median	66.7%	63.4%	36.4%
	75th Percentile	73.0%	77.5%	41.9%

WHEN DO FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS LEAVE? (MEDIAN ATTRITION DURING EACH TERM)*



This graphic shows attrition, the inverse of persistence, based on the data in Table 12.

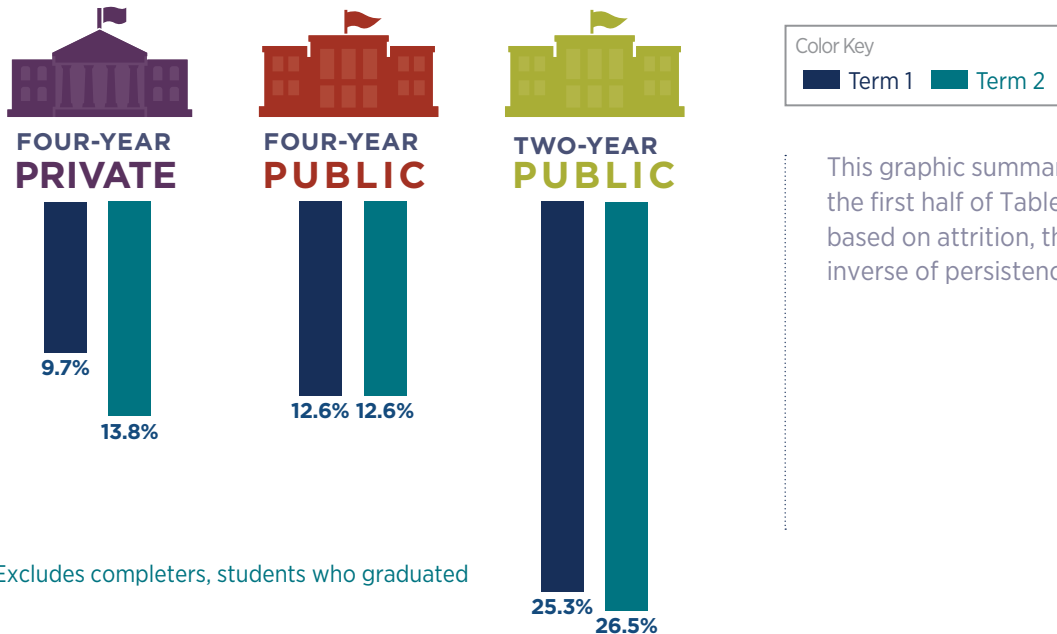
Data sets for this longitudinal analysis were slightly different from earlier data sets in this report, as not all poll respondents provided complete information for all cells, a prerequisite for this analysis. The effects of rounding add to these differences.

TABLE 13: LONGITUDINAL VIEW FOR TRANSFER STUDENTS CONTINUING ENROLLMENT, TERMS ONE TO FIVE (BASED ON 2014-15 NEWLY ARRIVED TRANSFER STUDENT COHORT)

Continuation Rates		FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE	FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC	TWO-YEAR PUBLIC
Persistence from term one to term two, 2014-15 academic year	25th Percentile	82.8%	83.7%	67.1%
	Median	90.3%	87.4%	74.8%
	75th Percentile	93.8%	91.8%	84.8%
Persistence from term two of the 2014-15 academic year to term three (first term of 2015-16 academic year)	25th Percentile	68.6%	67.6%	40.2%
	Median	76.5%	74.9%	48.3%
	75th Percentile	81.3%	81.3%	56.1%
Persistence from term three to term four of 2015-16 academic year	25th Percentile	63.0%	61.8%	30.1%
	Median	70.0%	68.5%	35.5%
	75th Percentile	77.5%	75.6%	49.8%
Persistence from term four of the 2015-16 academic year to term five (first term of 2016-17 academic year)	25th Percentile	44.6%	49.4%	14.9%
	Median	57.8%	55.2%	23.7%
	75th Percentile	70.1%	68.7%	38.4%

WHEN DO NEWLY-ARRIVED TRANSFER STUDENTS LEAVE?

(MEDIAN ATTRITION DURING EACH TERM)*



This graphic summarizes the first half of Table 13 based on attrition, the inverse of persistence.

*Excludes completers, students who graduated

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Thank you to those who participated

Data in this report reflect responses from 138 nonprofit colleges and universities that collectively enroll 722,483 students. Respondents participated in the Ruffalo Noel Levitz national electronic poll of undergraduate student retention indicators between January 30 and February 21, 2017. The poll was emailed to campus officials at accredited, degree-granting institutions across the United States. Respondents included 83 four-year private institutions, 21 four-year public institutions, and 34 two-year public institutions, as listed below.

Note: Ruffalo Noel Levitz conducts this study every two years. **For previous reports, visit RuffaloNL.com/BenchmarkReports.**

FOUR-YEAR PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

Agnes Scott College (GA)	Lipscomb University (TN)
Alvernia University (PA)	Manhattanville College (NY)
American International College (MA)	Marian University (IN)
Anna Maria College (MA)	Marietta College (OH)
Assumption College (MA)	Marquette University (WI)
Aultman College of Nursing and Health Sciences (OH)	Maryland Institute College of Art (MD)
Benedictine College (KS)	Marymount California University (CA)
Berry College (GA)	Mercer University (GA)
Bethel College (IN)	Metropolitan College of New York (NY)
Buena Vista University (IA)	Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MO)
Cairn University (PA)	Millikin University (IL)
California Intercontinental University (CA)	Mount Marty College (SD)
Capital University (OH)	Mount Saint Mary College (NY)
Central Christian College of Kansas (KS)	Mount Vernon Nazarene University (OH)
Clarkson University (NY)	New York School of Interior Design (NY)
Cleary University (MI)	Northland College (WI)
Concordia University (OR)	Northwestern College (IA)
Concordia University (CA)	Ottawa University (KS)
Concordia University - St. Paul (MN)	Regent University (VA)
DeSales University (PA)	Saint Mary's University of Minnesota (MN)
Earlham College (IN)	Saint Vincent College (PA)
Elms College (MA)	Seattle University (WA)
Emmanuel College (GA)	Siena College (NY)
Emory & Henry College (VA)	Spring Arbor University (MI)
Fisher College (MA)	St. Louis College of Pharmacy (MO)
Florida Southern College (FL)	St. Olaf College (MN)
Franciscan University of Steubenville (OH)	Taylor University (IN)
Gallaudet University (DC)	Texas Lutheran University (TX)
Georgian Court University (NJ)	Texas Wesleyan University (TX)
Green Mountain College (VT)	Toccoa Falls College (GA)
Hillsdale College (MI)	Unity College (ME)
Houston Baptist University (TX)	University of Mary (ND)
Iowa Wesleyan University (IA)	University of Mount Union (OH)
Judson University (IL)	University of Pikeville (KY)
Keuka College (NY)	University of Saint Francis (IN)
Laguna College of Art + Design (CA)	University of St. Francis (IL)
Lancaster Bible College (PA)	University of the West (CA)
Lebanon Valley College (PA)	Utica College (NY)
LeTourneau University (TX)	Valparaiso University (IN)
Lindenwood University, Belleville Campus (IL)	Whitworth University (WA)
Lindenwood University, St. Charles Campus (MO)	Xavier University of Louisiana (LA)
Linfield College (OR)	

Any participating two-year private colleges are included among the four-year private institutions.

FOUR-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Florida State University (FL)
 Governors State University (IL)
 Grand Valley State University (MI)
 Indiana University Southeast (IN)
 Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IN)
 Louisiana State University and Agricultural
 and Mechanical College (LA)
 McNeese State University (LA)
 Mississippi State University (MS)
 Murray State University (KY)
 Nicholls State University (LA)
 Oklahoma State University Institute
 of Technology-Okmulgee (OK)
 Shawnee State University (OH)
 Southwestern Oklahoma State University (OK)
 State University of New York College at Geneseo (NY)
 The University of Texas at Dallas (TX)
 Towson University (MD)
 University of Central Oklahoma (OK)
 University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (MA)
 University of Minnesota-Morris (MN)
 University of Southern Indiana (IN)
 University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (WI)

TWO-YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Alexandria Technical & Community College (MN)
 Arizona Western College (AZ)
 Bevill State Community College (AL)
 Blackhawk Technical College (WI)
 Bucks County Community College (PA)
 Calhoun Community College (AL)
 Carl Sandburg College (IL)
 Cascadia College (WA)
 Chandler-Gilbert Community College (AZ)
 Cleveland State Community College (TN)
 College of the Mainland (TX)
 East Central College (MO)
 Eastern Idaho Technical College (ID)
 Edison State Community College (OH)
 Elgin Community College (IL)
 Highland Community College (KS)
 Hinds Community College (MS)
 Kalamazoo Valley Community College (MI)
 Kishwaukee College (IL)
 McHenry County College (IL)
 Mesa Community College (AZ)
 Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MN)
 Mitchell Technical Institute (SD)
 Nassau Community College (NY)
 North Central Missouri College (MO)
 North Shore Community College (MA)
 Northeastern Junior College (CO)
 Pennsylvania Highlands Community College (PA)
 Solano Community College (CA)
 Southeastern Community College (NC)
 Southern Arkansas University Tech (AR)
 Southwestern Oregon Community College (OR)
 Surry Community College (NC)
 Wharton County Junior College (TX)

Questions? Call 800.876.1117 to speak with an expert

We hope you found this report to be helpful and informative. If you have questions and would like to schedule a private, complimentary conversation with an expert from Ruffalo Noel Levitz, please call us or email ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com. Our consultants are also available to come to your campus to conduct assessments of student success programming and enrollment management operations, and to assist with college completion planning.

About Ruffalo Noel Levitz and our higher education research

Ruffalo Noel Levitz provides higher education and nonprofit organizations with technology-enabled services, software, and consulting for enrollment and fundraising management. Since 1973, we have partnered with more than 3,000 colleges and universities and numerous nonprofit clients worldwide.

For more than 20 years, we have conducted national surveys to assist higher education with benchmarking its performance. This includes benchmarking student retention indicators and marketing/recruitment practices and outcomes, monitoring student and campus usage of the web and electronic communications, and comparing institutional budgets and policies. There is no charge or obligation for participating, and responses to all survey items are strictly confidential. Participants have the advantage of receiving the findings first, as soon as they become available.

For more information, visit ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com.

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