



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

---

**Seventy-six percent of first-time freshmen in fall 2018 returned to college for their second year. This rate represents the third straight year of little improvement in this important early success indicator.**

---

The **Persistence and Retention report** series examines first-year persistence and retention rates for beginning postsecondary students. Persistence rate is measured by the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year, while retention rate is by the percentage of students who return to the same institution. Students attaining a credential in their first year are accounted for in persistence and retention rates. The report is designed to help institutions understand trends and patterns in this important early success indicator, and identify disparities by institutional type, state, degree level, starting enrollment intensity, and student demographic factors such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

### National Highlights

- The overall first-year persistence rates barely changed in recent years, from 2015 to 2018.
- Of the 2.6 million students who enrolled in college as a first-time undergraduate student in fall 2018, 75.9 percent (about 2 million people) persisted at any U.S. institution by fall 2019.
- An average of 9.2 percent of freshmen, in any fall term between 2009 and 2018, transferred to a different institution by the following fall.



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

### What's New

This year's report made improvements in three major ways. First, cohort definition is enhanced by removing graduate-level program enrollments. In 2014 institutions began reporting enrollment data by program levels to the National Student Clearinghouse and by 2015 the program-level data became more reliable for the persistence rate analysis. Leveraging these data, we revised the longitudinal trend from 2014 onwards in first-year persistence for undergraduate students. Second, current dual enrollees who take college courses while in high school are removed from the cohorts. But we continue to account for former dual enrollees. Third, the "Non-Degree" category shown in past editions is refined and renamed as "Non-Credential (such as academic remediation, teacher certification)." Some students, for whom program info is unknown, are no longer captured in the "Non-Credential" category.

Thanks to these refinements, the current edition more accurately reflects the first-year retention and persistence among undergraduate students, and the results may differ from the previous reports. (More details on these refinements can be found in the methodological notes at the end of the report.)

### List of Figures

- Figure 1a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: All Institutions
- Figure 1b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: All Institutions
- Figure 2. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: All Institutions
- Figure 3a. Persistence Rates by Age Group at Entry: All Institutions
- Figure 3b. Retention Rates by Age Group at Entry: All Institutions
- Figure 4a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 4b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 5. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Public Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 6a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Two-Year Institutions
- Figure 6b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Two-Year Institutions
- Figure 7. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Public Two-Year Institutions
- Figure 8a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 8b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 9. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 10a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 10b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions
- Figure 11. Persistence and Retention Rates in Top Five Common Majors: Bachelor's Degree
- Figure 12. Persistence and Retention Rates in Top Five Common Majors: Associate Degree
- Figure 13. Persistence and Retention Rates in Top Five Common Majors: Undergraduate Certificate



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

### Overall Persistence and Retention Rates

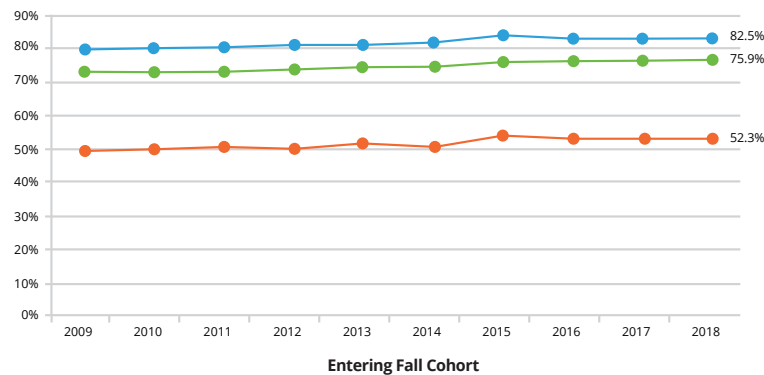
Among the 2.6 million people who enrolled in college as a first-time undergraduate student in fall 2018, 75.9 percent (about 2 million people) persisted at any U.S. institution by fall 2019 (Figure 1a), while 67 percent (more than 1.7 million people) were retained at their starting institution (Figure 1b).

The overall first-year persistence rates barely changed in recent years, from 2015 to 2018.

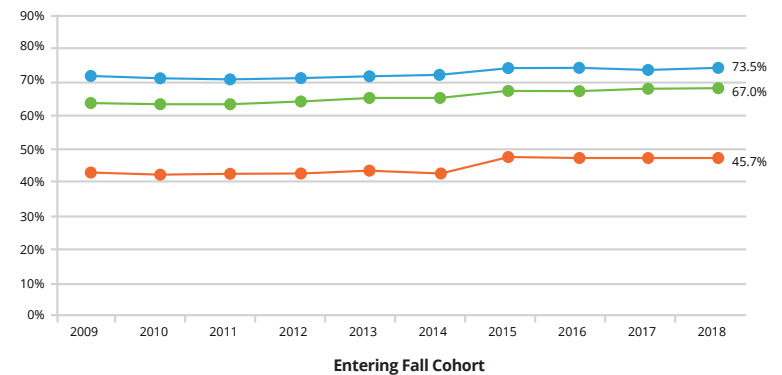
An average of 9.2 percent of freshmen, in any fall term between 2009 and 2018, transferred to a different institution by the following fall. The average transfer-out rate was higher for students who first entered as full-time (9.6%) than for those who began as part-time (7.4%).

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 1a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: All Institutions**



**Figure 1b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: All Institutions**



● Full-Time ● Overall ● Part-Time

|           |             | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  |
|-----------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Overall   | Retention   | 63.2% | 62.9% | 62.9% | 63.9% | 65.0% | 64.9% | 66.3% | 66.5% | 66.7% | 67.0% |
|           | Persistence | 72.4% | 72.3% | 72.3% | 73.2% | 74.1% | 74.1% | 75.6% | 75.8% | 75.6% | 75.9% |
| Full-Time | Retention   | 70.2% | 69.7% | 69.6% | 70.5% | 71.5% | 71.7% | 73.3% | 73.4% | 73.2% | 73.5% |
|           | Persistence | 80.0% | 79.6% | 79.5% | 80.2% | 81.0% | 81.3% | 83.0% | 83.0% | 82.4% | 82.5% |
| Part-Time | Retention   | 42.0% | 41.4% | 41.3% | 42.1% | 42.9% | 42.3% | 46.2% | 45.7% | 45.7% | 45.7% |
|           | Persistence | 49.5% | 49.3% | 49.1% | 50.0% | 50.8% | 50.2% | 53.1% | 52.6% | 52.3% | 52.3% |

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



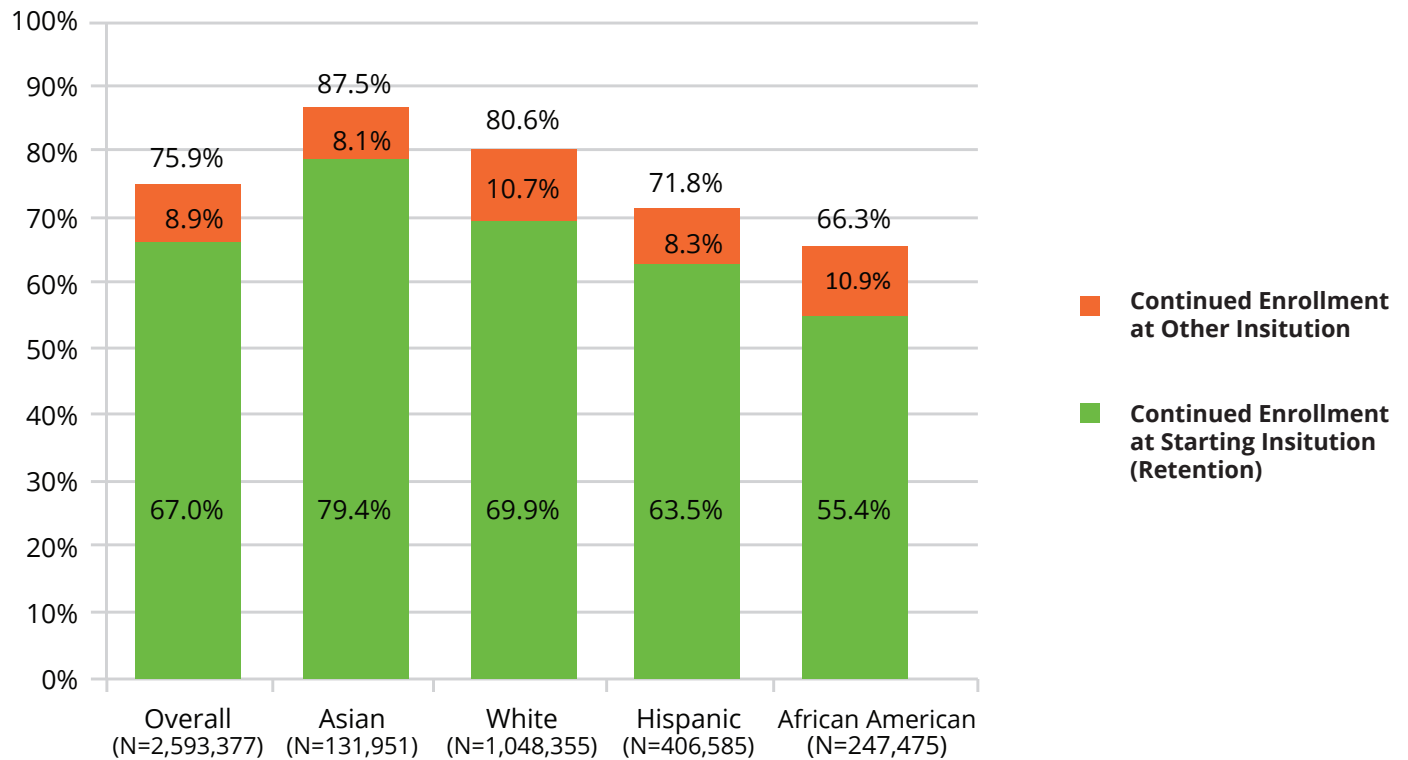
## Disparities by Race and Ethnicity

For the fall 2018 beginning cohort, racial and ethnic gaps remained large in persistence and retention rates. Asians and whites had significantly higher persistence rates than Hispanics or African Americans (Figure 2). Compared to white students' persistence rate, there was an 8.8 percent point difference for Hispanic students, and a 14.3 percent point difference for African American students.

Generally, students who persisted were likely to return to their starting institution: 67 percent continued enrollment at the starting institution, while 8.9 percent moved to a different institution. These patterns differed by race and ethnicity. Asians, who had the highest persistent rate, were least likely to continue enrollment at a different institution than their starting institution (8.1%), while African Americans with the lowest persistence rate were the most likely to move to a different institution during their first year (10.9%).

With data current through fall 2019

### Figure 2. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: All Institutions



Note: Race and ethnicity data was reported for 82 percent of the students in the fall 2018 cohort.

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

### Disparities by Age at College Entry

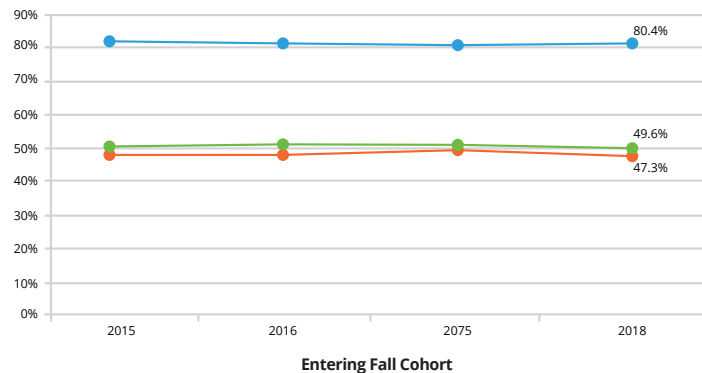
Depending on the age at first college entry, the first-year persistence and retention rates differ significantly. Fall 2018 beginning college students aged 20 or younger had the highest persistence rate of all age groups for the following fall, at 80.4 percent (Figure 3a). Older students demonstrated significantly lower persistence rates: Students aged 21 to 24 at entry were 30.8 percent points lower, and those age 25 or older were 33.2 percent points lower, compared to traditional college-age students.

Students aged 20 or younger at entry also showed a higher likelihood to continue enrollment at their starting institution in the second year (70.6%, as shown in Figure 3b). This retention rate was 25 percent points higher than those aged 21 to 24, and 26 percent points higher than those age 25 or older.

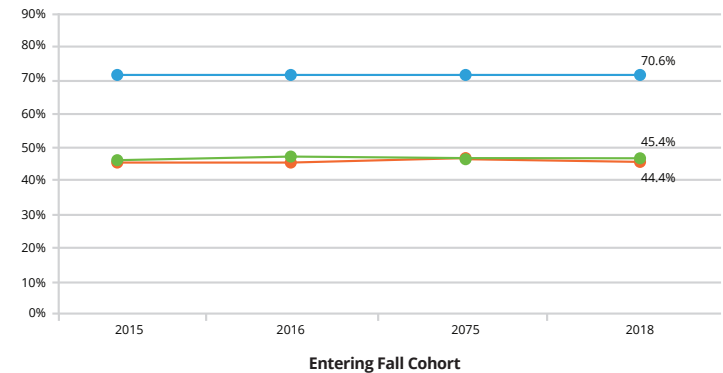
Over the past few years, there was very little change in both persistence and retention rates for all age groups, except for students age 25 and older who saw slightly greater rate declines from 2017 to 2018. Therefore, there was no sign of narrowing in the age-related gaps.

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 3a. Persistence Rates by Age Group at Entry: All Institutions**



**Figure 3b. Retention Rates by Age Group at Entry: All Institutions**



● Age 20 or Younger ● Age 21-24 ● Age 25 or Older

|                          |             | 2009  | 2010 | 2011        | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  |       |
|--------------------------|-------------|---|------|-------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Age 20 or Younger</b> | Retention   |   |      |             |      |      |      | 70.5% | 70.4% | 70.2% | 70.6% |       |
|                          | Persistence |   |      | Unavailable |      |      |      | 80.8% | 80.7% | 80.1% | 80.4% |       |
| <b>Age 21-24</b>         | Retention   | Reliable credential-level information became available in 2015. From 2015 onwards, students with identified graduate enrollments were removed, and dataset only accounts for undergraduate students. Therefore, information from Fall 2009 to Fall 2014 is not directly comparable to subsequent cohorts, and is not shown. |      |             |      |      |      |       | 45.3% | 46.2% | 45.6% | 45.4% |
|                          | Persistence |   |      |             |      |      |      |       | 50.0% | 50.9% | 50.2% | 49.6% |
| <b>Age 25 or Older</b>   | Retention   |   |      |             |      |      |      |       | 44.4% | 44.4% | 45.7% | 44.4% |
|                          | Persistence |   |      |             |      |      |      |       | 47.6% | 47.6% | 48.8% | 47.3% |

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

### Starting at Public Four-Year Institutions

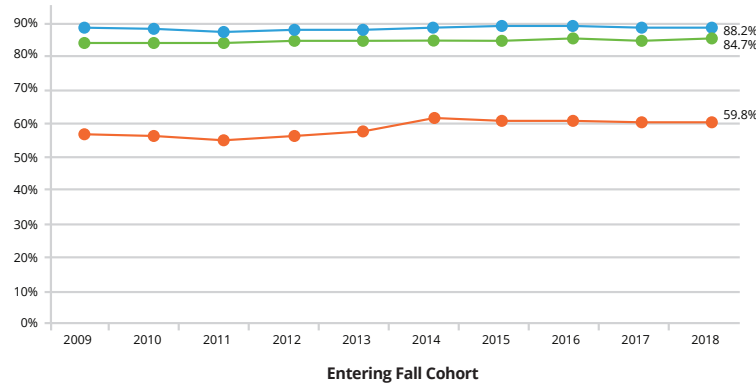
For students who started college in fall 2018 at public four-year institutions, the persistence rate was 84.7 percent, which was a slight increase (0.8 percent points) from the 2009 cohort (Figure 4a).

The persistence rate was 88.2 percent for those who entered college on a full-time basis, compared to 59.8 percent for those who entered college on a part-time basis.

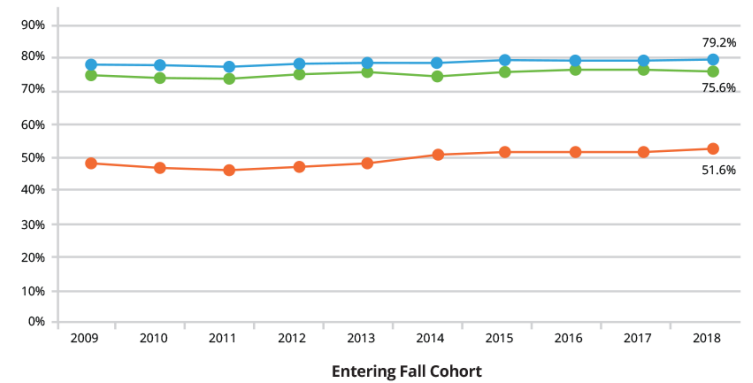
Of all students who started college in this sector in fall 2018, 75.6 percent returned to the same institution in fall 2019 (Figure 4b).

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 4a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Four-Year Institutions**



**Figure 4b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Four-Year Institutions**



● Full-Time ● Overall ● Part-Time

|                  |             | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  |
|------------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Overall</b>   | Retention   | 73.8% | 73.5% | 73.3% | 74.1% | 75.0% | 74.2% | 75.0% | 75.3% | 75.3% | 75.6% |
|                  | Persistence | 83.9% | 83.6% | 83.3% | 84.0% | 84.5% | 84.0% | 84.6% | 84.9% | 84.6% | 84.7% |
| <b>Full-Time</b> | Retention   | 77.6% | 77.1% | 76.6% | 77.4% | 78.2% | 78.4% | 78.9% | 79.0% | 78.7% | 79.2% |
|                  | Persistence | 87.9% | 87.3% | 86.9% | 87.3% | 87.7% | 88.2% | 88.6% | 88.6% | 88.0% | 88.2% |
| <b>Part-Time</b> | Retention   | 47.6% | 46.7% | 45.9% | 46.3% | 47.7% | 49.8% | 50.9% | 51.5% | 51.3% | 51.6% |
|                  | Persistence | 55.9% | 55.6% | 54.5% | 55.8% | 57.2% | 61.1% | 60.6% | 60.3% | 59.8% | 59.8% |

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



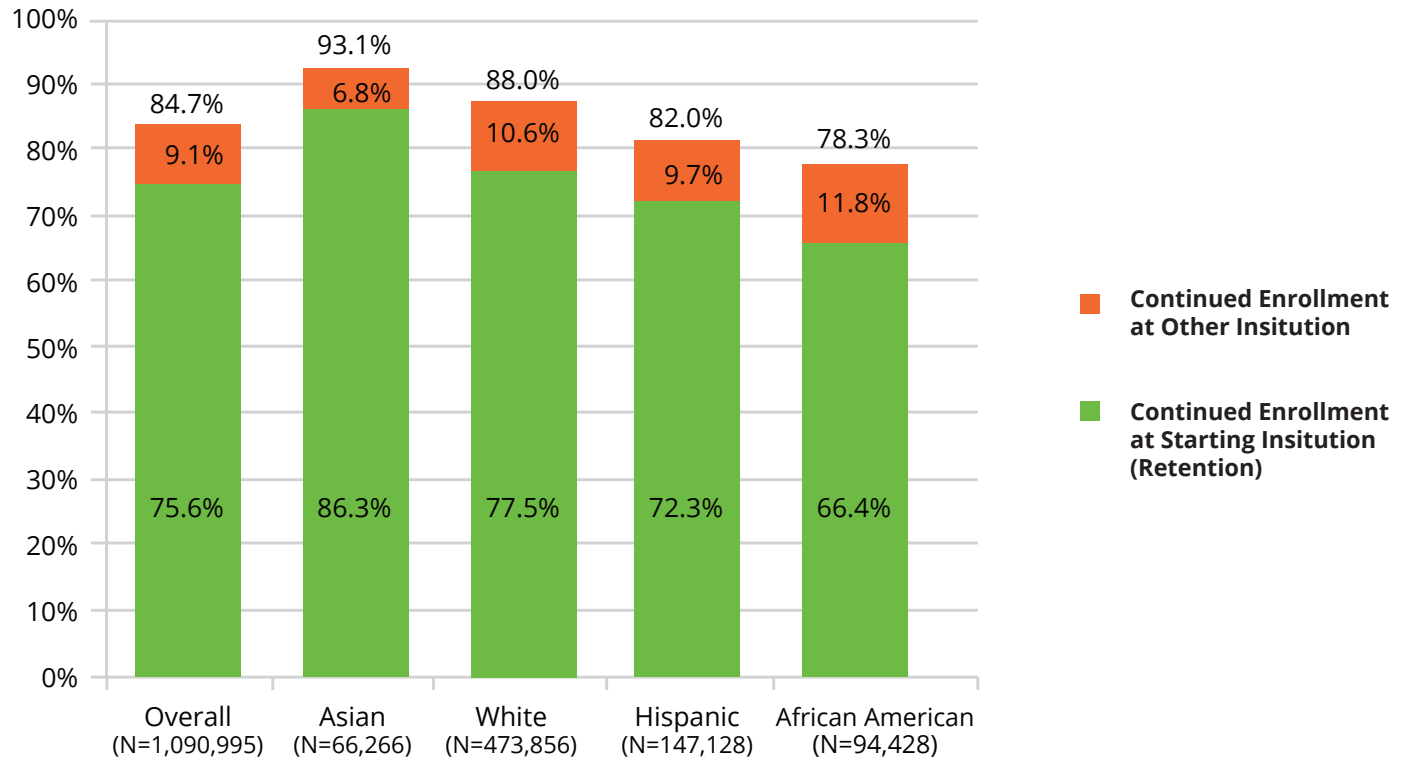
## Racial and Ethnic Disparities at Public Four-Year Institutions

Asian and white students who started at public four-year institutions demonstrated higher persistence rates compared to Hispanic and African American students (Figure 5).

African American students had the lowest persistence and retention rates compared to Asian, white, and Hispanic students. However, the persistence rate gap between white and African American students was slightly smaller compared to overall (9.8% for public four-year institutions versus 14.3% overall). The persistence rate gap between African American and Hispanic students was also smaller compared to all other institutions with a 3.7 percent point difference between them.

With data current through fall 2019

### Figure 5. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Public Four-Year Institutions



Note: Race and ethnicity data was reported for 84 percent of the fall 2018 cohort students in this sector.

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

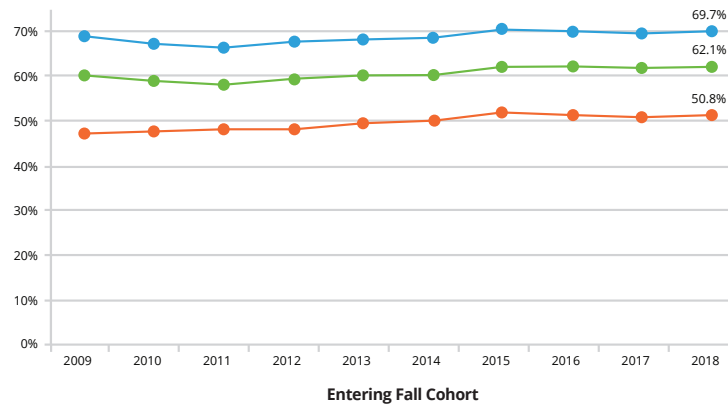
### Starting at Public Two-Year Institutions

For students who started college in fall 2018 at public two-year institutions, the persistence rate was 62.1 percent, up 0.6 percentage points from the prior year cohort (Figure 6a). The persistence rate was 69.7 percent for those who entered college on a full-time basis, compared to 50.8 percent for their part-time counterparts (a 19 percentage point difference).

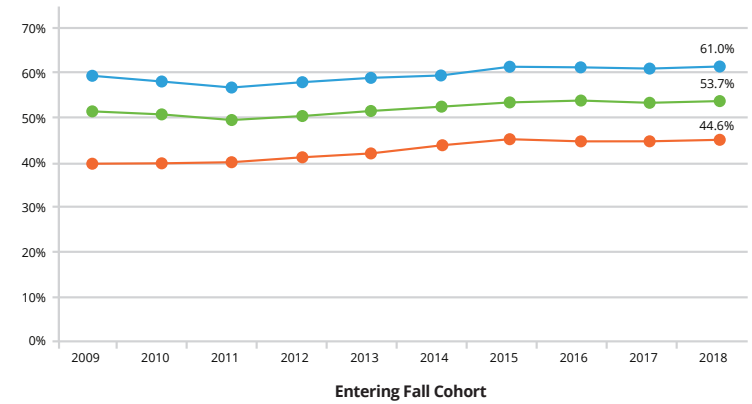
Of all students who started college in public two-year institutions in fall 2018, 53.7 percent returned to the same institution in fall 2019 (Figure 6b). The persistence rates remained flat since the 2015 cohort year, for both entering full-time and part-time students.

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 6a.** Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Two-Year Institutions



**Figure 6b.** Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Public Two-Year Institutions



● Full-Time ● Overall ● Part-Time

|           |             | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  |
|-----------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Overall   | Retention   | 51.3% | 50.2% | 49.3% | 50.4% | 51.3% | 51.9% | 53.2% | 53.4% | 53.2% | 53.7% |
|           | Persistence | 59.6% | 58.7% | 57.9% | 59.0% | 59.9% | 60.2% | 61.9% | 61.8% | 61.4% | 62.1% |
| Full-Time | Retention   | 59.5% | 57.7% | 56.5% | 57.7% | 58.4% | 59.1% | 60.7% | 61.0% | 60.2% | 61.0% |
|           | Persistence | 68.5% | 66.9% | 66.0% | 67.2% | 67.8% | 68.3% | 70.1% | 70.0% | 69.0% | 69.7% |
| Part-Time | Retention   | 39.6% | 39.6% | 39.6% | 40.7% | 41.6% | 43.8% | 45.0% | 44.4% | 44.4% | 44.6% |
|           | Persistence | 46.9% | 47.1% | 47.1% | 48.1% | 48.9% | 49.8% | 51.2% | 50.7% | 50.6% | 50.8% |

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).





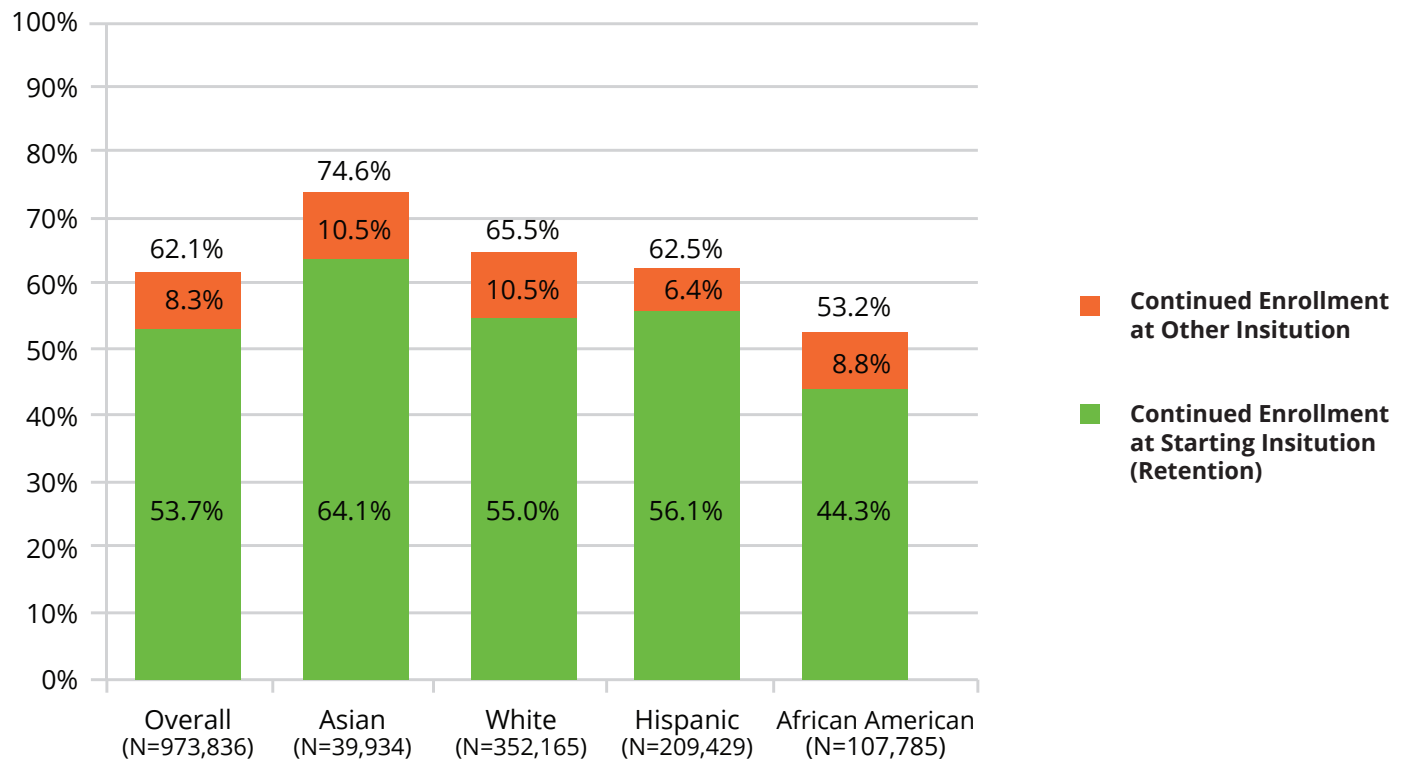
## Racial and Ethnic Disparities at Public Two-Year Institutions

Among students who entered public two-year institutions in 2018, the persistence rate gap between Asian and white students was greatest of all institution sectors, with the Asian persistence rate surpassing the white rate by 9 percentage points. Further illustrating the racial/ethnic gap is that there was an overall retention rate gap of 6.4 percent between white and Hispanic students, but the gap is reversed between these two groups enrolling at public two-year institutions, with the white retention rate trailing behind the Hispanic rate by 1 percent point (Figure 7).

Eight percent of students who entered public two-year institutions moved to an institution other than their starting institution in fall 2019. Notably, Hispanic and African American students were less likely to move to another institution by fall 2019 (6.4% and 8.8%, respectively) compared to white and Asian students (10.5% for both groups).

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 7. Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Public Two-Year Institutions**



Note: Race and ethnicity data was reported for 83 percent of the fall 2018 cohort students in this sector. Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

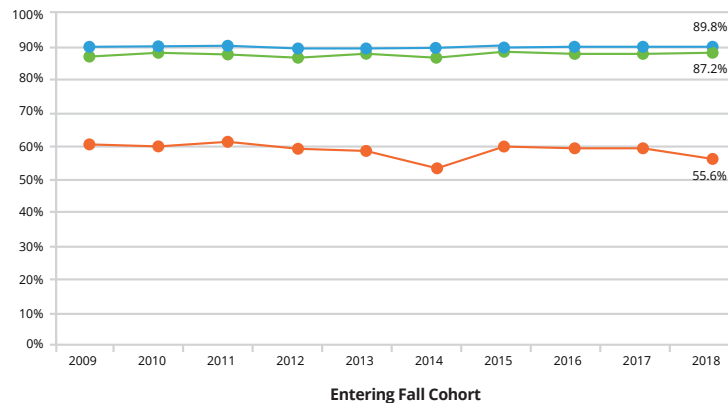
### Starting at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions

For students who started college in fall 2018 at private nonprofit four-year institutions, the persistence rate was 87.2 percent, down 0.2 percentage points from the prior year cohort (Figure 8a), whereas the retention rate remained at 77.2 percent (Figure 8b).

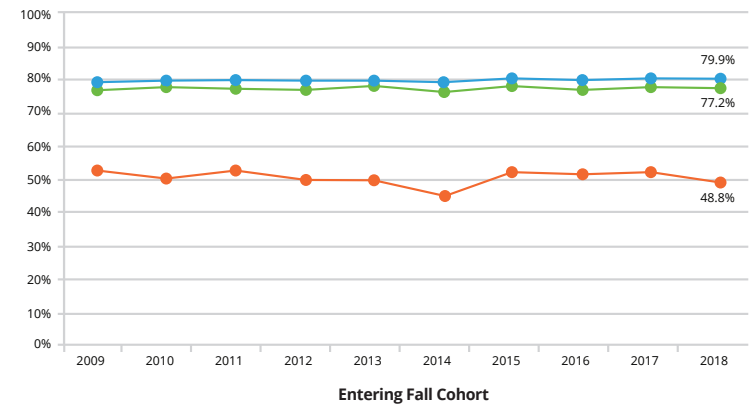
While the full-time and overall persistence and retention rates remained flat between the 2015 and 2018 cohorts, the persistence rate for part-time students decreased 3.5 percentage points to 55.6 percent over the past year. This subsequently increased the persistence rate gap between full-time and part-time students to 34.2 percentage points, the largest full-time and part-time gap of all institution sectors.

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 8a. Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions**



**Figure 8b. Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions**



● Full-Time ● Overall ● Part-Time

|           |             | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  |
|-----------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Overall   | Retention   | 76.3% | 76.8% | 76.9% | 76.2% | 76.7% | 76.0% | 76.9% | 76.7% | 77.2% | 77.2% |
|           | Persistence | 86.8% | 87.6% | 87.3% | 86.3% | 86.7% | 86.2% | 87.2% | 87.3% | 87.4% | 87.2% |
| Full-Time | Retention   | 78.8% | 78.8% | 78.8% | 78.3% | 78.9% | 79.0% | 79.8% | 79.5% | 79.8% | 79.9% |
|           | Persistence | 89.5% | 89.7% | 89.3% | 88.5% | 89.0% | 89.5% | 90.0% | 90.1% | 89.9% | 89.8% |
| Part-Time | Retention   | 52.3% | 50.1% | 52.5% | 49.5% | 49.3% | 44.8% | 52.0% | 51.2% | 51.7% | 48.8% |
|           | Persistence | 60.2% | 59.7% | 61.0% | 58.7% | 58.0% | 52.9% | 59.4% | 58.9% | 59.1% | 55.6% |

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



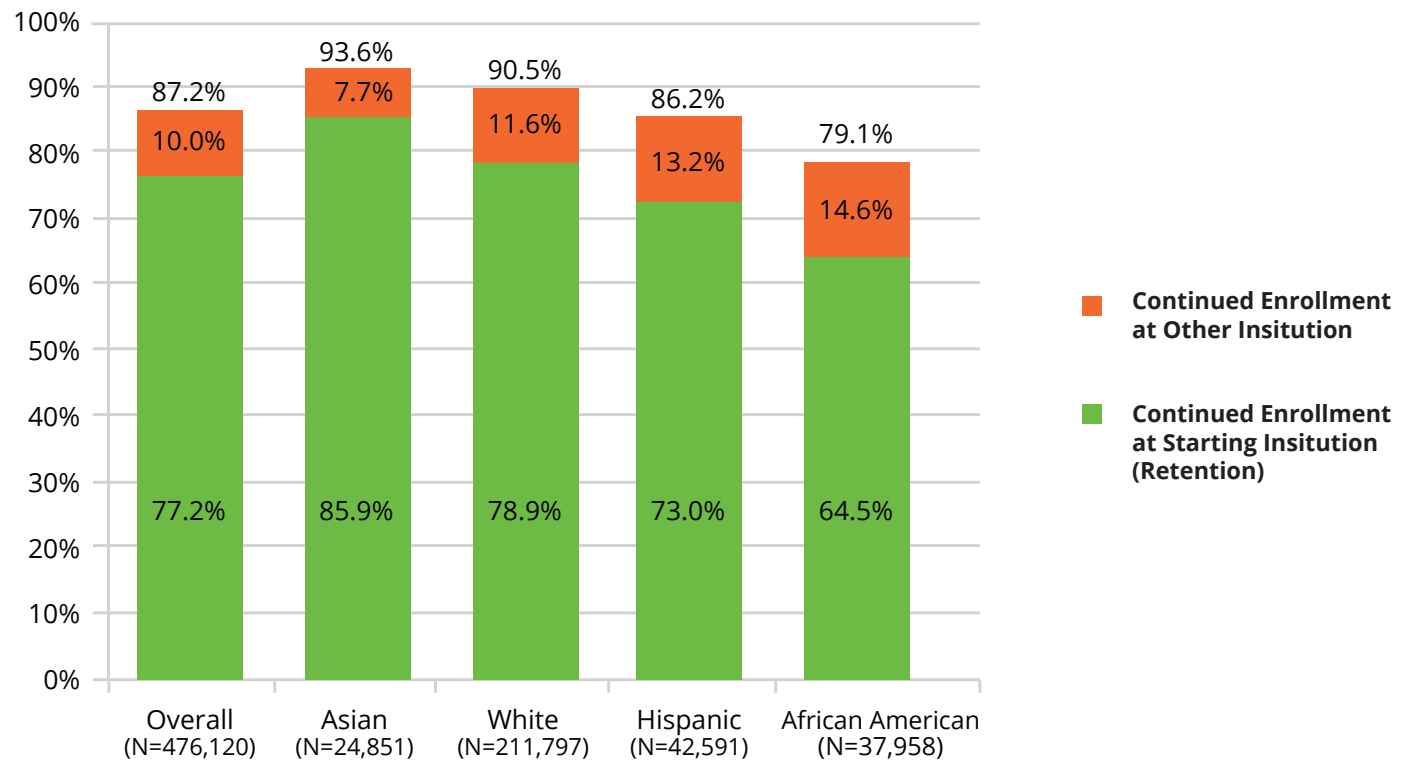
## Racial and Ethnic Disparities at Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions

Among students who entered private nonprofit four-year institutions in fall 2018, Asian and white students were more likely to continue enrollment in fall 2019 compared to Hispanic and African American students (Figure 9). African American students, similar to other institution sectors, had the lowest retention rate, but compared to the public college sector, they also lagged even further behind Asians (by 21.5 percent points), whites (by 14.4 percent points), and Hispanics (by 8.6 percent points).

Students who persisted were likely to return to their starting institution at 77.2 percent, and an additional 10 percent enrolled elsewhere. African Americans displayed the highest transfer-out rates, with students nearly two times more likely than Asian students to continue enrollment at another institution (14.6 percent versus 7.7 percent).

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 9.** Persistence and Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Private Nonprofit Four-Year Institutions



Note: Race and ethnicity data was reported for 80 percent of the fall 2018 cohort students in this sector.

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).



## FIRST-YEAR PERSISTENCE AND RETENTION 2018 BEGINNING COHORT

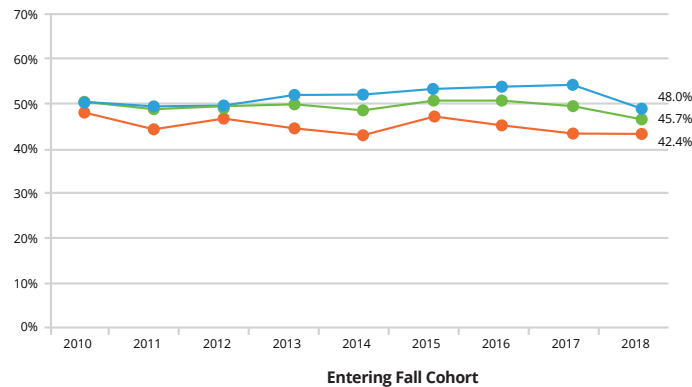
### Starting Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions

For students who started college in private for-profit four-year institutions, the persistence rate was 45.7 percent, down 3.3 percentage points from the prior year cohort, and down 5.5 percentage points in comparison to the fall 2015 cohort (Figure 10a).

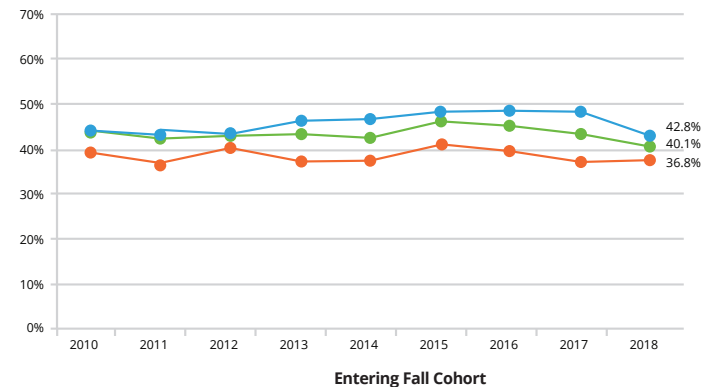
The persistence rate was 48 percent for those who entered college on a full-time basis, compared to 42.4 percent for those who entered college on a part-time basis. Of all students who started college in fall 2018, 40.1 percent returned to the same institution in fall 2019 (Figure 10b).

With data current through fall 2019

**Figure 10a.** Persistence Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions



**Figure 10b.** Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity: Private For-Profit Four-Year Institutions



● Full-Time ● Overall ● Part-Time

|           |             | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  |
|-----------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Overall   | Retention   | 42.9% | 41.4% | 42.4% | 42.8% | 42.0% | 45.6% | 44.5% | 43.0% | 40.1% |
|           | Persistence | 49.6% | 48.0% | 48.6% | 49.4% | 48.1% | 51.3% | 50.8% | 49.0% | 45.7% |
| Full-Time | Retention   | 43.8% | 42.7% | 43.2% | 45.7% | 46.3% | 47.6% | 47.8% | 47.7% | 42.8% |
|           | Persistence | 50.1% | 48.9% | 49.1% | 51.9% | 52.0% | 52.9% | 53.9% | 53.2% | 48.0% |
| Part-Time | Retention   | 38.9% | 35.6% | 39.7% | 36.4% | 36.4% | 40.7% | 38.9% | 36.4% | 36.8% |
|           | Persistence | 47.4% | 43.8% | 46.6% | 43.9% | 42.5% | 46.9% | 44.6% | 42.4% | 42.4% |

Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).

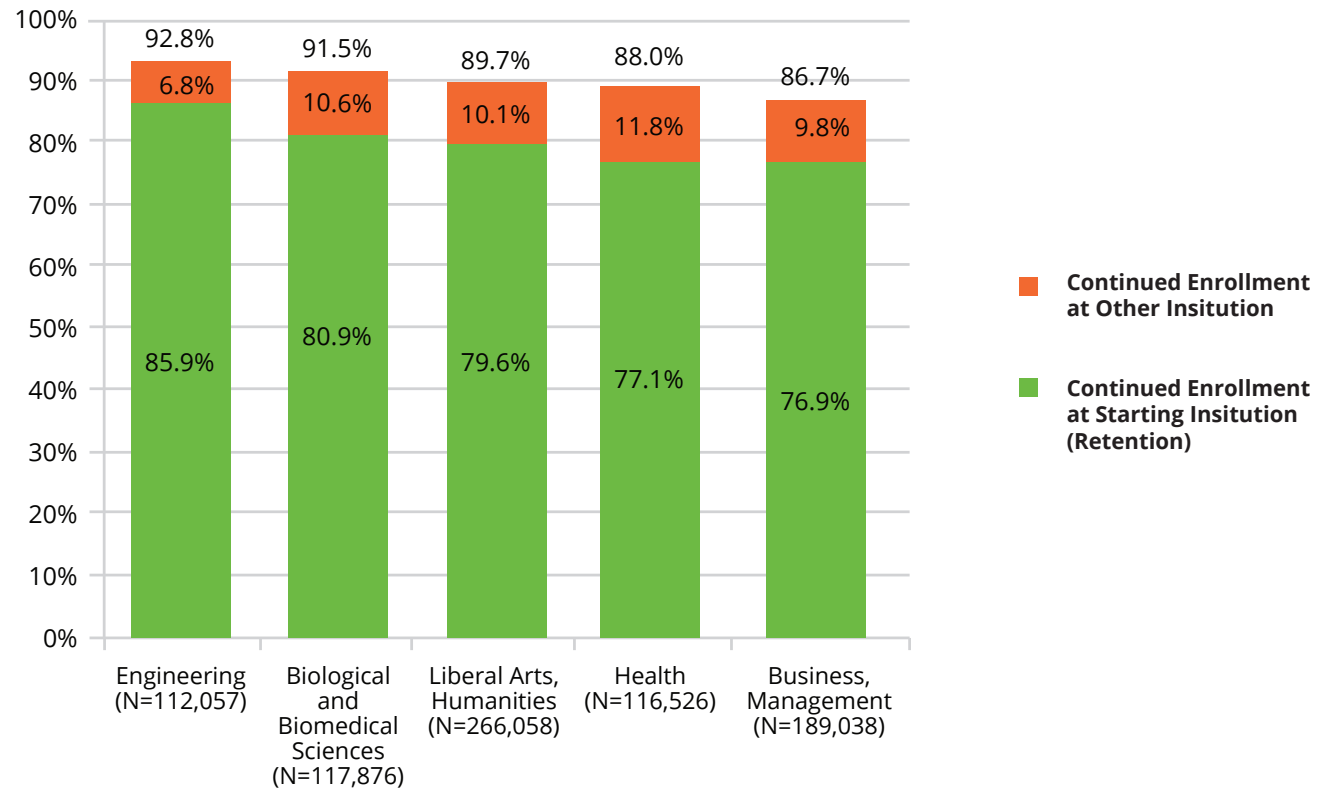


## Top Five Common Majors Bachelor's Degree Level

Among the five most common majors by enrollment for fall 2018 baccalaureate-degree-seeking students, the persistence rate in engineering was highest at 92.8 percent, with biology and biomedical majors following closely with a persistence rate of 91.5 percent (Figure 11). Biology and biomedical majors were more likely to transfer to another institution by their second year compared to engineering students. Students in health-related majors were the most likely to transfer to another institution by their second year (11.8%).

With data current through fall 2019

### Figure 11. Persistence and Retention Rates in Top Five Common Majors: Bachelor's Degree



Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).

Common majors are defined by enrollment sizes. N is the total enrollment in the specified field of major as of fall 2018. Major fields shown are: Engineering (CIP code 14), Biological/Biomedical Sciences (26), Liberal Arts (24), Health (51), and Business (52).

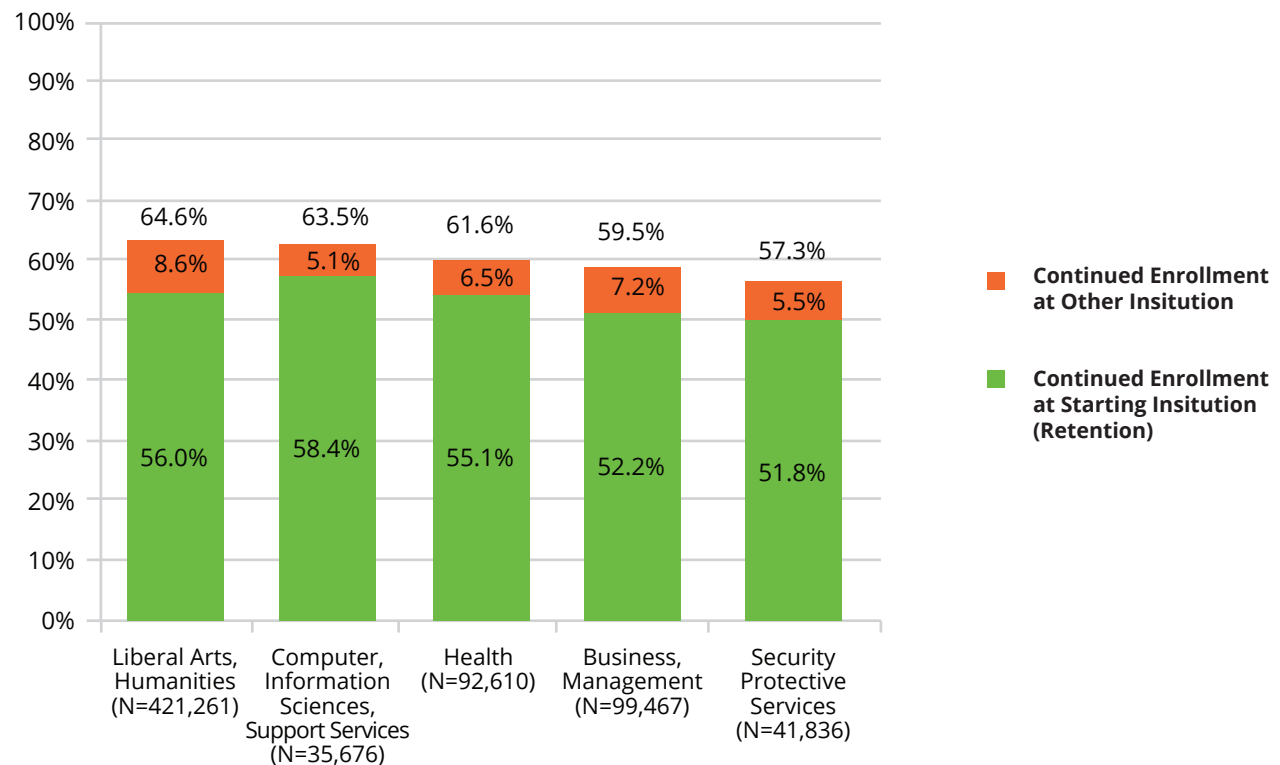


## Top Five Common Majors Associate Degree Level

Among the five most common associate degree majors by enrollment, the persistence rate was the highest for Liberal Arts, General Studies, and Humanities students at 64.6 percent (Figure 12). Students in computer sciences had the highest retention rate at 58.4 percent, the lowest transfer-out rate of all top five majors (5.1%).

With data current through fall 2019

### Figure 12. Persistence and Retention Rates in Top Five Common Majors: Associate Degree



Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).

Common majors are defined by enrollment sizes. N is the total enrollment in the specified field of major as of fall 2018. Major fields shown are: Liberal Arts (CIP code 24), Computer Science (11), Health (51), Business (52), and Security Protective Services (43).



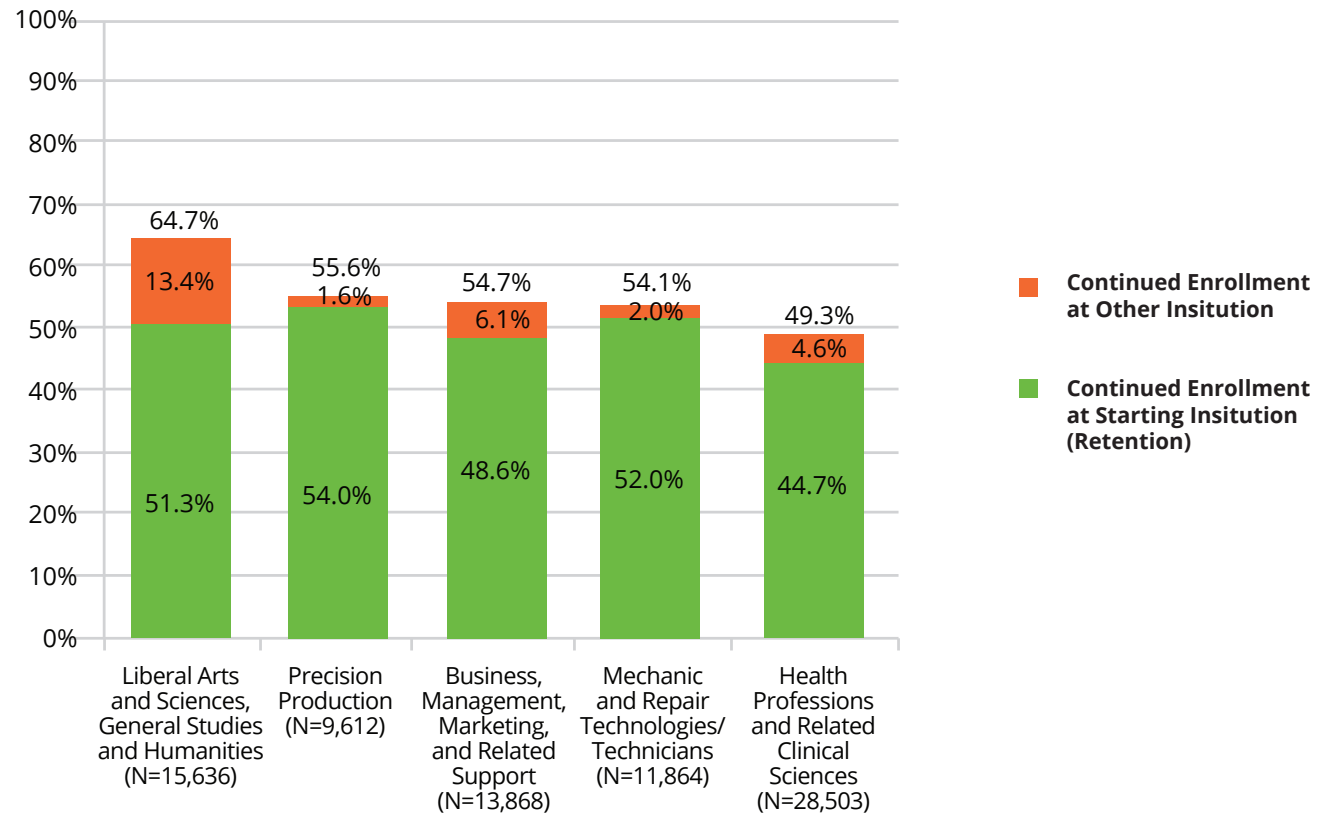
## Top Five Common Majors Certificate Level

The persistence rates for the top five common majors in undergraduate certificate programs by enrollment were below 60 percent, except for Liberal Arts, Humanities, and General Studies majors with a persistence rate of 64.7 percent (Figure 13).

Like associate degree program students, certificate-seeking students in Liberal Arts, General Studies and Humanities continued enrollment in a different institution at a rate more than two times greater than other popular majors (13.4%). Precision production majors had the lowest transfer-out rates compared to other popular certificate programs (1.6%). Students in these programs also had the highest retention rate across all popular undergraduate certificate programs (54%).

With data current through fall 2019

### Figure 13. Persistence and Retention Rates in Top Five Common Majors: Undergraduate Certificate



Data tables and methodological notes are available in the [Appendix](#).

Common majors are defined by enrollment sizes. N is the total enrollment in the specified field of major as of fall 2018. Majors shown are: Liberal Arts (CIP code 24), Business (52), Mechanic Repair (47), Precision (48), and Health (51).



## Methodological Notes

### Higher Education Enrollment

Many postsecondary institutions that are degree-granting and participating in Title IV voluntarily report their enrollments to National Student Clearinghouse. These reporting institutions collectively represent 97 percent of the IPEDS postsecondary student enrollments as of 2018.

### Degree/Certificate-Seeking Status

The report is designed to examine retention and persistence rates for undergraduate-level degree-seeking students (certificate, associate, or bachelor's degrees), including both U.S. and international students. While degree-seeking students make up the vast majority of the first-time beginning postsecondary student cohort, the beginning cohort for our analysis also includes a small number of first-time college students enrolled in non-credential programs, or students for whom program level information was unknown but had valid enrollment records for the applicable entering cohort year.

Starting with the 2015 beginning cohort, we show persistence and retention trends for students enrolled in non-credential programs such as preparatory coursework, teacher certification, or other non-credit career and technical education (CTE) programs that may lead to an industry certification if the student takes the certification exam. Non-credential enrollments made up approximately two percent of the fall 2018 beginning cohort.

Also starting with the 2015 beginning cohort, we show program level unknown, which consists of students whose credential program level was unreported (certificate, associate, or bachelor's degrees). The circumstances behind the lack of program information are institution-specific and can range from first-time students who are required to be undeclared until they declare a specific major, to non-degree students. Program level unknown enrollments made up approximately three percent of the fall 2018 cohort population.

Past editions included a subset of students who were enrolled in graduate programs (approximately 3.7% of each beginning cohort). To ensure the beginning cohort consisted solely of undergraduate students, we removed graduate enrollments from the cohorts and the data from 2014 onwards were restated to reflect the change.

### Retention

Defined in this report as continued enrollment (or degree completion) within the **same** higher education institution in the fall terms of a student's first and second year.

### Persistence

Defined in this report as continued enrollment (or degree completion) at **any** higher education institution — including one different from the institution of initial enrollment — in the fall terms of a student's first and second year.

### Enrollment Intensity

A student is classified as having started college in a full-time status or part-time status based on their earliest reported enrollment intensity within the entering fall term. The part-time category comprises three-quarter-time, half-time and less-than-half-time students. We included non-credential enrollments in overall persistence and retention calculations, and reported them in a separate category in the Appendix.





## First-Year Persistence and Retention: Definitions and Notes on Cohort Selection Continued

### **First-Time Status**

This report uses historical Clearinghouse enrollment and degree data to confirm that students included in the study (1) showed no previous college enrollment, (2) had not previously completed a college degree or certificate, and (3) their first time enrollment in an applicable cohort year was not categorized as dual enrollment (that is, any enrollment prior to age 18). Starting with the current report, current dual enrollments were excluded from each cohort.

### **Former Dual Enrolled Students**

The cohorts used in this study include former dual enrollment students: first time college students who had taken college courses prior to graduating from high school. Students were identified as former dual enrollment students if their enrollment or degree record prior to the entering cohort year was before the student turned 18 years old.

### **Fall Enrollment**

A student is counted as having been enrolled in the fall if they were enrolled for any length of time in a term that began between August 1 and October 31, inclusive.

### **Program Level Enrollment by Major Fields**

Persistence and retention rates by major fields were calculated based on institution reporting of enrollments at bachelor's degree, associate degree, and certificate program levels under the NCES' 6-digit CIP (Classification of Instructional Programs). The results were aggregated at 2-digit CIP code levels.