

2.3 Graduation and Persistence Rates (Based on Clearinghouse Data)

Research by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center provides important information about the completion and persistence rates of students who start college at Nebraska's public and independent institutions.

This section of the *Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report* summarizes the findings of a recent study of the six-year completion and persistence rates of degree-seeking, first-time freshmen who started college in Nebraska in fall 2009. The annual study was conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center and is published in the report *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*. First available in February 2013, the report presents the findings of the NSC's fourth annual study of six-year student outcomes based on a national cohort analyzed by state as well as for the United States as a whole. The report is important because it presents comparable six-year completion and persistence rates for students who started college at (a) two-year public colleges, (b) four-year public colleges and universities, and (c) four-year private nonprofit institutions.³⁴

Introduction to the National Student Clearinghouse Study

The completion and persistence rates reported in this section are based on the enrollment and completion records maintained by the NSC since 2005. An analysis of these records resulted in a national cohort of approximately 2.9 million college students who could be classified as degree-seeking, first-time freshmen in fall 2009.³⁵ The enrollment and completion records of these students were then analyzed through the six-year period ending May 31, 2015.

Each student was classified by the state of the institution where the student first entered college, not by the student's residential home state. First-time enrollment status was established by confirming that a student (1) did not show any postsecondary enrollment record in the four years prior to June 1, 2009, and (2) did not receive a degree or certificate from any postsecondary institution prior to fall 2009. Consequently, data for 2005 through 2009 had to be available in the Clearinghouse database for an institution's students to be included in this study. In addition, records for the six-year period from fall 2009 through May 31, 2015 were required.

This study included students who entered college with prior college-level experience through taking dual enrollment courses in high school. In addition, students who began their studies in summer 2009 (May 1 through August 31) were included. The study was not limited to recent high school graduates.

The number of Nebraska's two-year and four-year institutions with Clearinghouse records dating back to 2005 varied by type of institution. The historical data coverage rate, based on student enrollments, for Nebraska's four-year public institutions was 100.0%, and Nebraska's four-year private nonprofit institutions coverage rate was 93.7%. Meanwhile, the historical coverage rate for Nebraska's two-year public colleges was 99.7%. (The Nebraska institutions included in the study are listed in Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 of this report.) The Nebraska cohort included 21,241 degree-seeking first-time freshmen—8,167 started college at two-year public institutions, 8,994 started college at four-year public institutions, and 4,080 started at four-year private nonpublic institutions.

³⁴ Students who began at multistate four-year nonprofit institutions were excluded from the results summarized in this section.

³⁵ Fall 2009 enrollment is defined as enrollment during any term beginning August 10 through October 31, 2009, inclusive. If no term started between these dates, the term that started between July 13 and August 9, 2009, inclusive, was used.

Degree-seeking status was defined differently for students at two-year and four-year schools. For students who started at four-year institutions, Clearinghouse records had to show that they were enrolled at least half time for at least one term. For students who started at two-year institutions, they had to either be enrolled for at least one term full time before August 9, 2010, or be enrolled at least half time for at least two terms before December 31, 2010.

The degree-seeking students in this study were classified as exclusively full-time students, exclusively part-time students, or mixed enrollment students. Mixed enrollment students were those who enrolled at least one term full-time and at least one term part-time over the course of their enrollment, rather than being enrolled exclusively full-time or part-time. (Enrollments during summer terms and shorter terms lasting less than 21 days were excluded from consideration.) For students enrolled concurrently at more than one institution, the two highest-intensity enrollment records were considered. So, if a student was concurrently enrolled half time at two institutions, that student was categorized as full time for that term.

Students were also divided into three groups based on the age of the students when they first entered college (20 or younger, 21–24, and 25 or older). Finally, student outcomes were analyzed by gender.

Reported Student Outcomes

The six-year student outcomes calculated and compared in the National Student Clearinghouse study are as follows:

Total completion rate: The percentage of the cohort who received diplomas or certificates from any institutions in the United States by the end of the defined six-year period.

Starting institution completion rate: The percentage of the cohort who received degrees or certificates from the same institutions where they enrolled as first-time freshmen.

Other institutions completion rates: The percentage of the cohort who received degrees or certificates from institutions anywhere in the United States to which they had transferred. This rate is reported separately for the two-year and four-year schools where the students did not initially enroll as first-time freshmen.

Note: For two-year public institutions, the percentage of students who completed degrees at four-year institutions after they completed programs at two-year colleges was also calculated (i.e., subsequent completion). This percentage added to the rate of first-time completions at four-year institutions equals the reported total four-year graduation rate for students who initially enrolled as first-time freshmen at two-year public institutions.

Persistence rate: The percentage of students in a cohort who did not earn a degree or other academic award but were still enrolled in college during the last year of the study period.

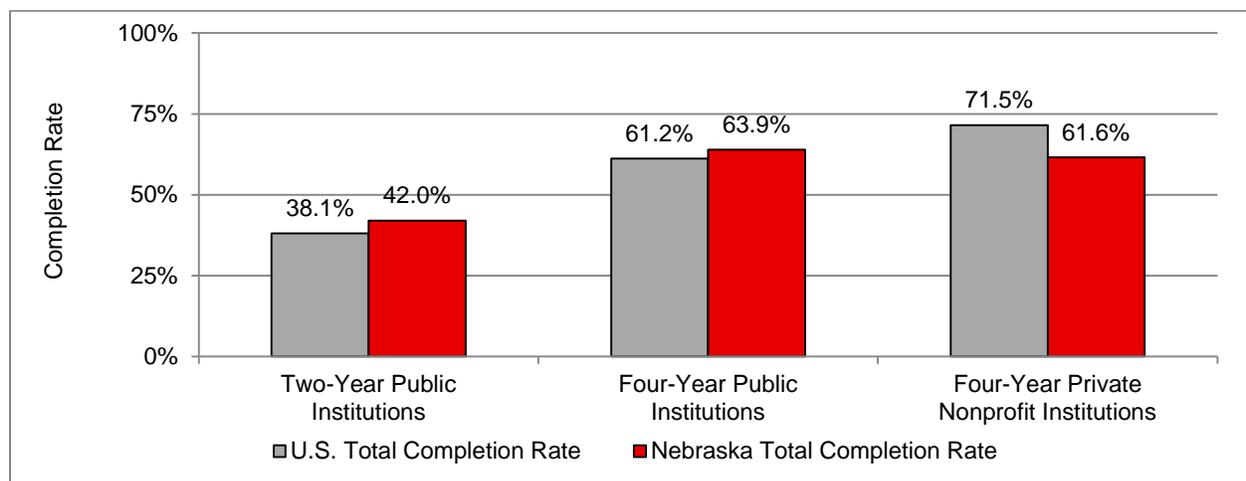
Percentage of students not enrolled: The percentage of the cohort who had not completed degrees or certificate programs and were not enrolled at any institution during the last year of the study period.

Nebraska Completion and Persistence Rates Compared to National Rates

- Figure 2.3.1 shows how the total completion rates for Nebraska institutions compared to the national rates for two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions.
- Total completion rates for degree-seeking, first-time freshmen at Nebraska's two-year and four-year public institutions were both higher than the comparable national rates.
- The total completion rate for Nebraska's four-year private nonprofit institutions was lower than the national rate for similar institutions.

Figure 2.3.1

Six-Year Total Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)

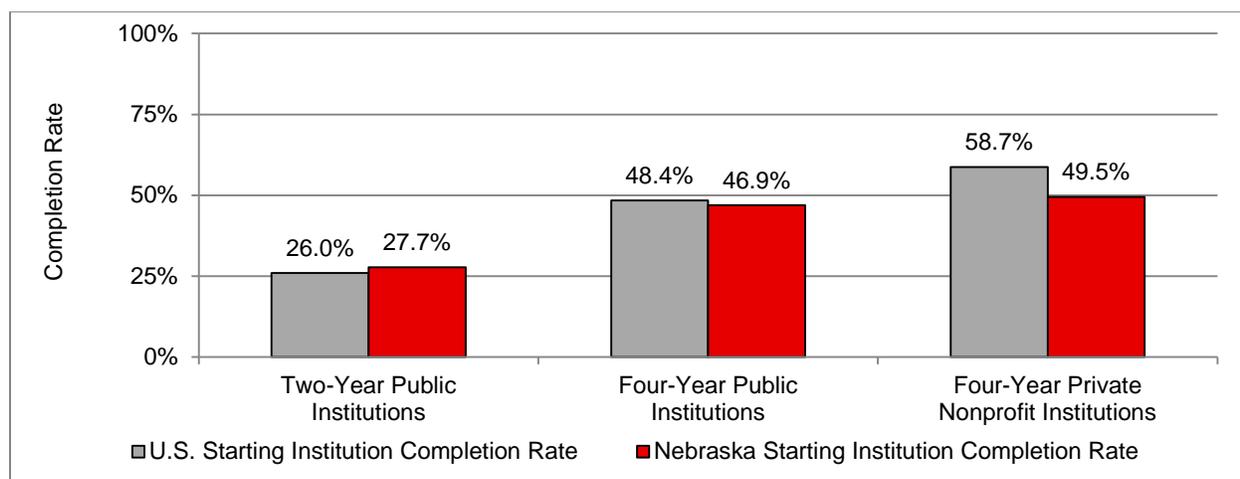


Note. See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

- Figure 2.3.2 compares the U.S. and Nebraska completion rates for students who received degrees or certificates from the same institutions where they initially enrolled as first-time freshmen.
- Completion rates for Nebraska's four-year public and private nonprofit institutions were both lower than the comparable national rates.
- The rate of first completion at the starting institution for Nebraska's two-year institutions was significantly lower than the rates for the four-year institutions, but the 27.7% completion rate for the two-year institutions was slightly higher than the 26.0% national rate for public two-year institutions.

Figure 2.3.2

Six-Year Starting Institution Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)

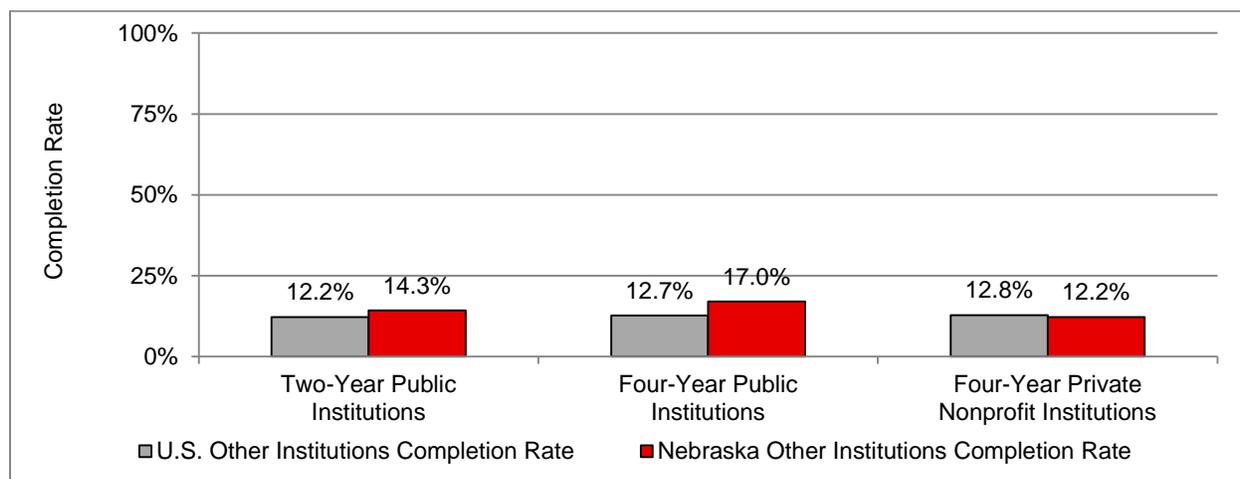


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

- As shown in Figure 2.3.3, a notable percentage of freshmen start college at one institution and then transfer to another school where they complete a program of study.
- 12% to 17% of the first-time students at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions graduated from two-year or four-year schools to which they had transferred.
- Nebraska’s rates at public institutions were higher than the comparable national rates; however, the rate for four-year private nonprofit institutions in Nebraska was slightly lower than the comparable national rate.

Figure 2.3.3

Six-Year “Other Institutions” Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)

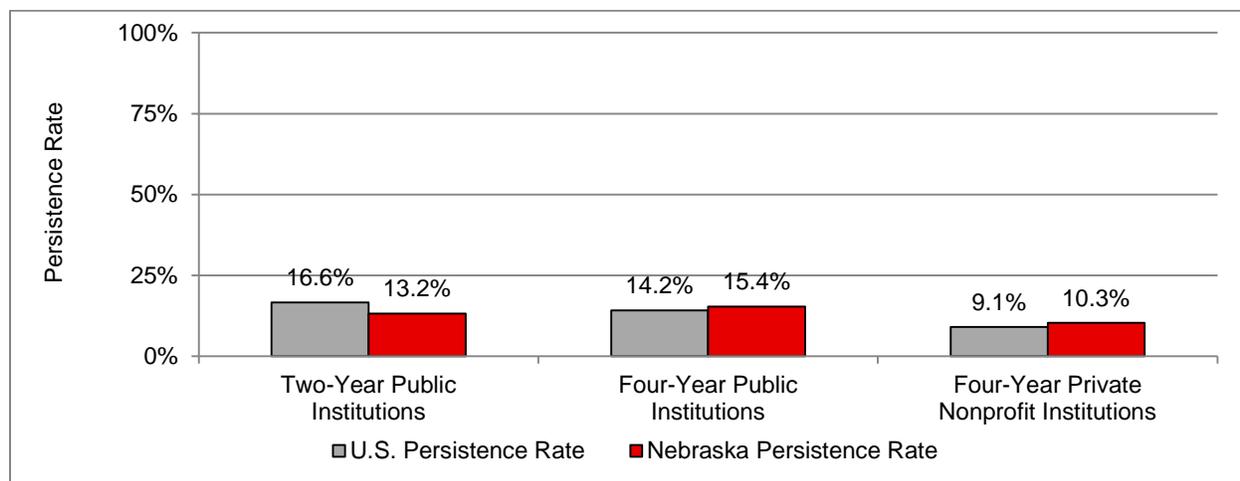


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.4](#), 10% to 15% of the students who started college at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions had not completed a degree or certificate program and were still enrolled at these or other institutions during the last year of the study period.
- Nebraska’s persistence rate for two-year public institutions was lower than the national persistence rate for similar institutions. However, Nebraska’s persistence rates for the other two sectors were generally in line with the reported national rates.

Figure 2.3.4

Six-Year Persistence Rates for Nebraska and the United States for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)



Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Enrollment Status

The findings of the National Student Clearinghouse study confirm that the completion rates of full-time students are significantly higher than for students who attend college only part-time. This study also reveals that the completion rates for students with combinations of full-time and part-time enrollment are higher than those for exclusively part-time students but lower than the rates for students who consistently go to college full time. In addition, this study confirms that part-time students are less likely to persist in their studies and more likely to drop out of college than exclusively full-time students.

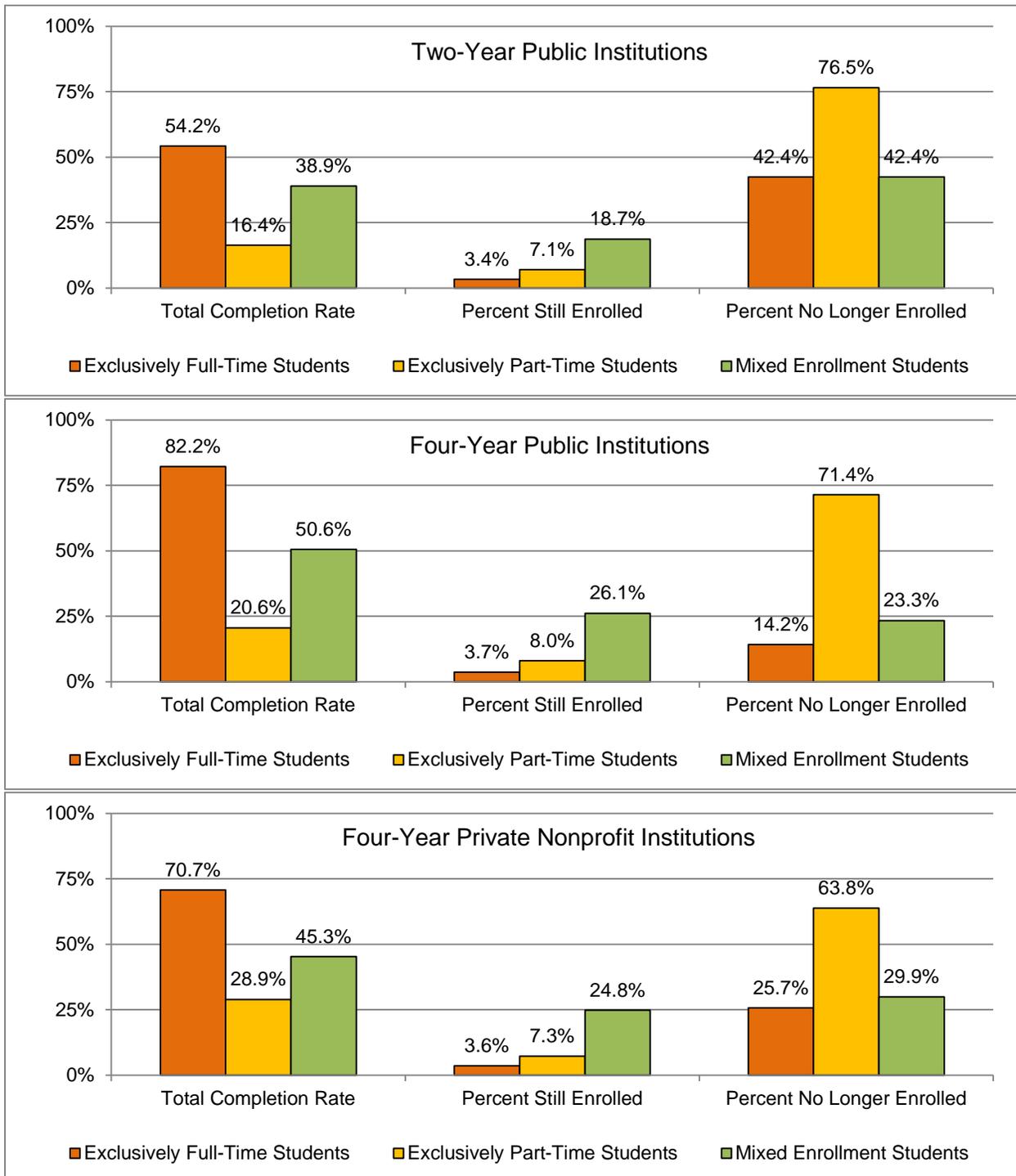
Student Outcomes Compared Within Each Sector

- [Figure 2.3.5](#) shows that exclusively part-time students had total completion rates that were significantly lower than the completion rates for exclusively full-time students or mixed enrollment students, regardless of whether they started college at two-year public, four-year public, or four-year private nonprofit institutions in Nebraska.
- The six-year persistence rates (i.e., the percentage of students who had not completed a degree or certificate program but were still enrolled) were highest for the mixed enrollment students and lowest for the exclusively full-time students, regardless of the type of institution where they enrolled as first-time freshmen.

- The percentage of students who were no longer enrolled six years after they started college was significantly higher for exclusively part-time students than for exclusively full-time students or mixed enrollment students.

Figure 2.3.5

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Student Enrollment Status for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)



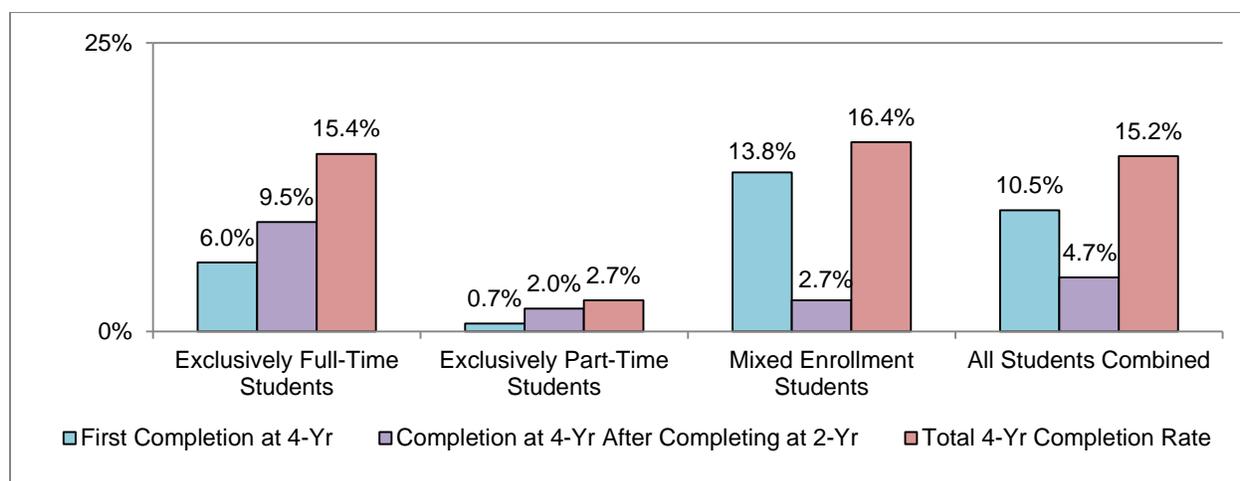
Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

Four-Year Completion Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions

- Another finding of the National Student Clearinghouse study that is of interest is the percentage of students who started college at two-year institutions but earned degrees at four-year institutions. As evidenced in [Figure 2.3.6](#), 15.2% of the students who initially enrolled at Nebraska’s two-year public colleges in fall 2009 had earned degrees from four-year institutions over the course of the next six years. For 10.5% of the cohort, these degrees were their first completions. For 4.7% of the cohort, their four-year degrees were subsequently completed after they had already completed a degree or certificate program at the two-year college where they initially enrolled or at another two-year school.
- Exclusively full-time students and mixed enrollment students had higher total four-year graduation rates than students who attended college part time. Interestingly, exclusively full-time students were more likely than mixed enrollment students to have earned four-year degrees after they had already earned degrees or certificates at two-year schools, even though the total four-year completion rates for these two groups of students were similar.

Figure 2.3.6

Nebraska Completion Rates for Four-Year Degrees Earned by Students Who Initially Enrolled at Two-Year Public Institutions for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)



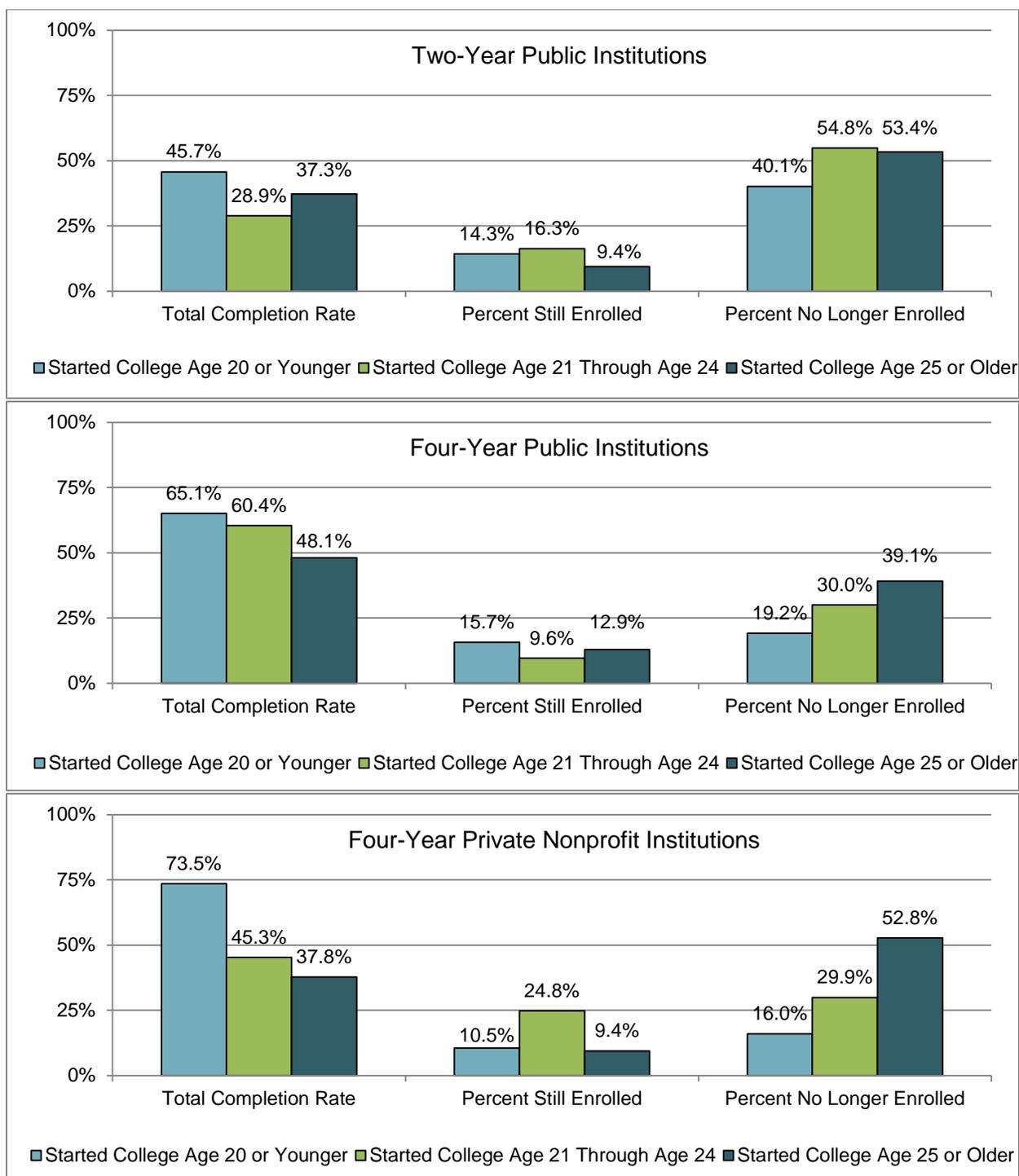
Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Age Group

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.7](#), students who started college when they were age 20 or younger were more likely to complete degrees or certificate programs than students who didn’t start college until they were over the age of 20, regardless of where they initially enrolled.
- Students who started college when they were age 21 through age 24 were less likely to complete degrees at two-year public institutions than students who started college when they were 25 years or older.
- The highest total completion rate for students age 20 or younger was 73.5% at the four-year private nonprofit schools. Meanwhile, the highest total completion rates for students age 21 through 24 and students age 25 or older were at four-year public institutions (60.4% and 48.1%, respectively).

Figure 2.3.7

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Age Group for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)



Note. See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016.

Nebraska Student Outcomes by Gender

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.8](#), females were more likely than males to have completed degrees or certificate programs within six years, regardless of sector.
- Across all sectors, the percentages of female students who left college before degree completion were much lower than the percentages of male students who dropped out of college. However, at the four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions, the persistence rates of students who did not earn a degree or certificate within six years were higher for males than for females.

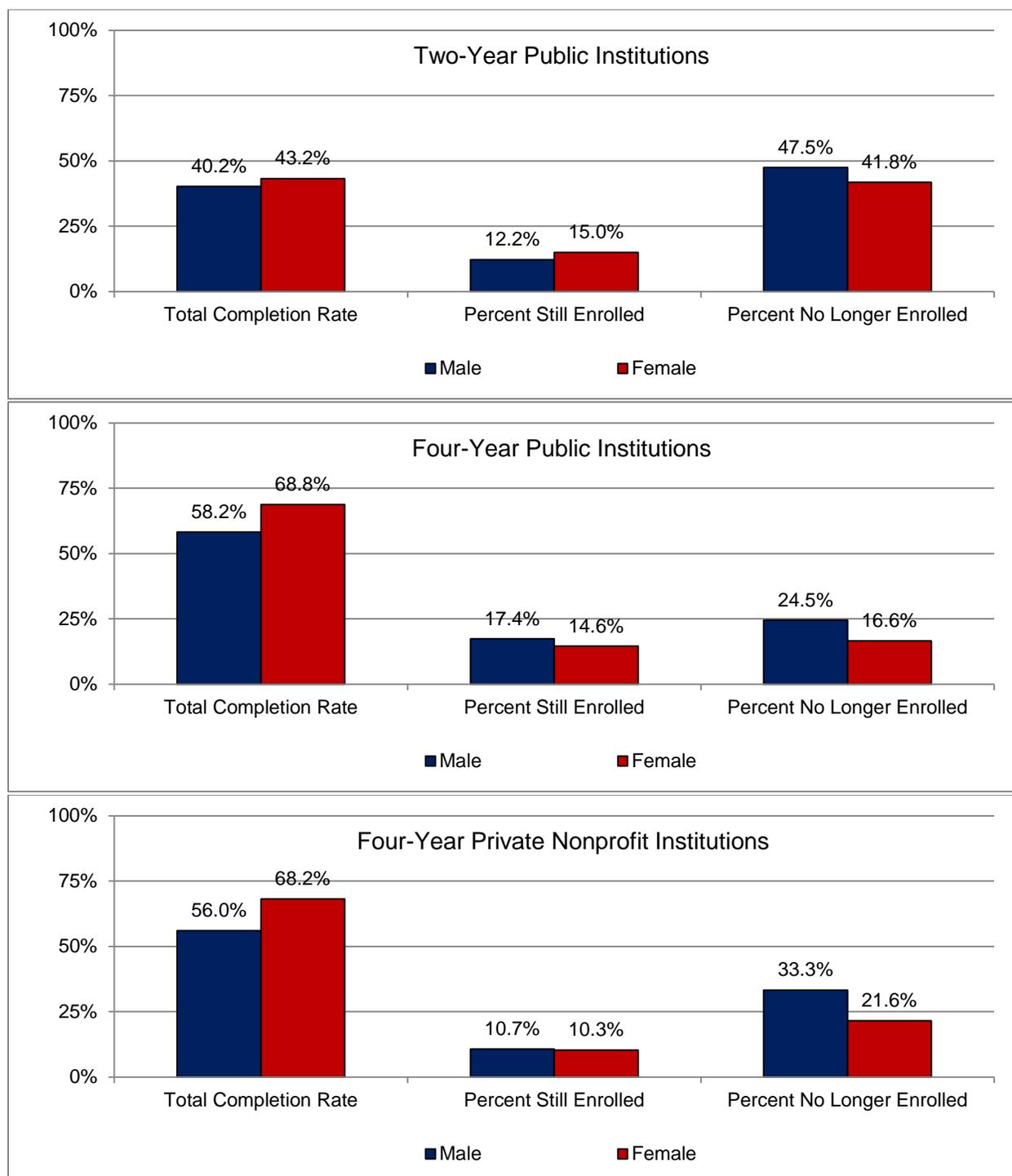
Conclusion

All of the six-year student outcomes for the United States as a whole and for Nebraska's public and private nonprofit institutions are presented in [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) of this report. When the national percentages are compared to Nebraska's percentages, Nebraska's rates were not consistently higher or lower than the national percentages. Instead, Nebraska's outcomes were higher, lower, or about the same as the comparable national rates, depending on the type of institution and the specific student enrollment or age group that was analyzed.

This study clearly shows that students who start college earlier and attend full time are much more likely to earn degrees and certificates. While this study is not without limitations, it does provide reasonable estimates of the six-year completion and persistence rates for Nebraska's two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions, compared to national rates.

Figure 2.3.8

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Gender for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2009)



Note. See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 10a), February 2016