

## Section 2

### Increasing College Retention and Graduation Rates

#### Priority 2. Increase the percentage of students who enroll and successfully complete a degree.

The second priority recommended by the 2003 LR 174 Task Force is to increase the percentage of students who enroll, persist, and successfully complete a degree. To achieve this goal, the LR 174 Task Force concluded that Nebraska's postsecondary education system must (1) decrease the percentage of students who fail to persist beyond their first year(s) of enrollment, (2) increase the percentage of students who complete associate degrees within three years and baccalaureate degrees within six years, and (3) expand upon and strengthen existing associate degree to baccalaureate degree transfer programs.

To monitor the extent to which the first and second strategic objectives are being achieved, this section focuses primarily on freshmen retention rates and college graduation rates that are based on data collected through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, the Coordinating Commission analyzes the transfer rates based on IPEDS data for Nebraska's six community colleges.

Retention rate: The rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall. Retention rates are reported for full-time and part-time students.

Graduation rate: The total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the adjusted cohort. Graduation rates are only available for full-time, first-time freshmen.

Transfer-out rate: Total number of students who are known to have transferred out of the reporting institution within 150% of normal time to completion divided by the adjusted cohort. Transfer-out rates are only available for full-time, first-time freshmen. Note that IPEDS data are not available to determine if transfer students persist in their studies and graduate from the institutions to which they transfer. In this report, the terms transfer-out rate and transfer rate are used interchangeably.

Cohorts for retention rates, graduation rates, and transfer rates are adjusted for allowable exclusions.<sup>31</sup>

The NCES is the best available source of data for monitoring the retention and graduation rates of institutions on an annual basis and over time, either by institution or by sector. However, the retention and graduation rates that are calculated using data collected through IPEDS are for first-time freshmen who continue their studies at the same institution where they started college. This type of student represents a decreasing percentage of postsecondary students. Consequently, a statewide analysis of retention and graduation rates

---

<sup>31</sup> For the Graduation Rates, Outcome Measures, and Fall Enrollment retention rate reporting, students may be removed from a cohort if they left the institution for one of the following reasons: death or total and permanent disability; service in the armed forces (including those called to active duty); service with a foreign aid service of the federal government, such as the Peace Corps; or service on official church missions.

based on NCES-IPEDS data does not provide any information about the persistence or graduation rates of a significant number of Nebraska college students who transfer to other institutions to continue their studies, including students who start college in the academic transfer programs offered by Nebraska's community colleges and then transfer to four-year schools to earn bachelor's degrees.

Another limitation of the currently available transfer data is that not all institutions are required to report the number of full-time, first-time freshmen who transfer to other schools. As a result, it is impossible to compute a statewide transfer rate that is comparable to Nebraska's statewide graduation rate. However, beginning with the 2010–2011 academic year, all six of Nebraska's community colleges have reported the number of students in their full-time, first-time freshmen cohorts who transferred to other schools. Resulting transfer rates for these schools are reported at the end of Section 2.2 on college graduation and transfer rates based on IPEDS data.

In addition to reporting the latest available retention, graduation, and transfer rates based on NCES-IPEDS data, this section of the *Progress Report* includes information about graduation and persistence rates obtained from research conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Using Clearinghouse data, six-year student outcomes based on national cohorts of degree-seeking, first-time freshmen were analyzed by state as well as for the United States as a whole. As a result, it provides additional information about the graduation and persistence rates of students who have started college at two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions in Nebraska.

The research conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center is not without limitations. However, the research encompasses part-time students as well as full-time students and includes students who transferred to other institutions before completing their programs of study. Including these students overcomes important limitations of the analyses that are based only on NCES-IPEDS data. In overcoming these limitations, the research conducted by the Clearinghouse provides previously unavailable information about graduation and persistence rates. Consequently, this information, presented in Section 2.3, should be of interest to public policy makers and administrators of postsecondary institutions in Nebraska.

## 2.1 Freshmen Retention Rates (Based on IPEDS Data)

**Increase the percentage of students who persist beyond their first year(s) of enrollment.**

The following analysis of freshmen retention rates is based on data reported by Nebraska institutions to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The NCES defines a retention rate as the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall. For all other institutions this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or successfully completed their program by the current fall. Separate retention rates are reported by institutions for their full-time and part-time students.

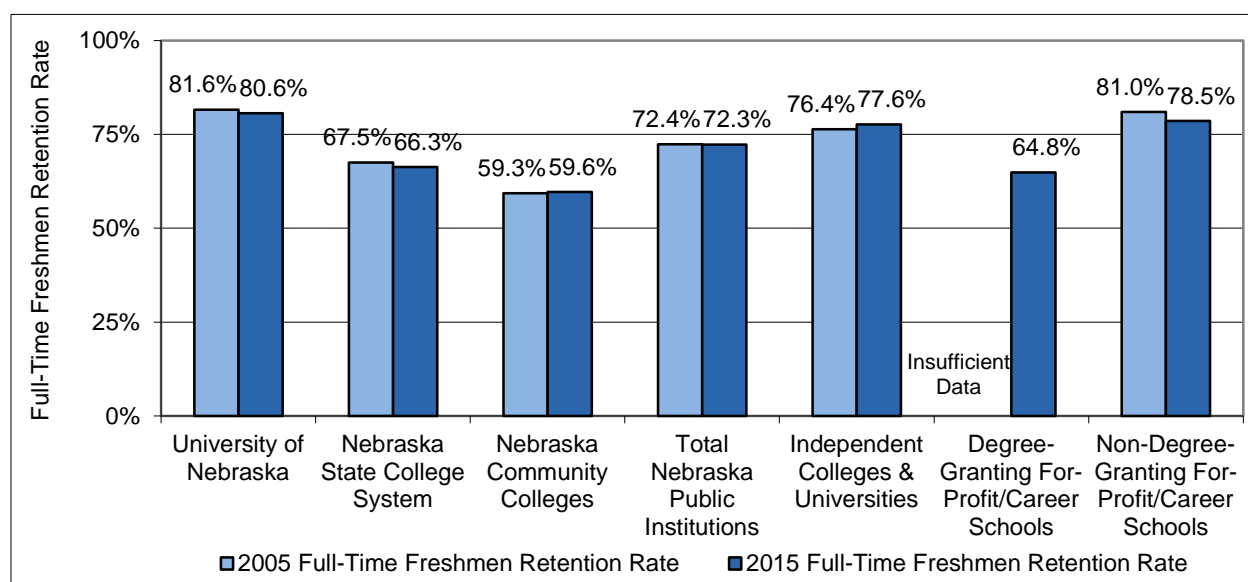
The latest available data are for fall 2015. Retention rates for fall 2016 will not be available until mid-2017 and will be reported in the *2018 Progress Report*. Consequently, the following analysis focuses on how fall 2015 retention rates compare to fall 2005 rates.

### **Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates by Sector and Institution**

Figure 2.1.1 shows that full-time freshmen retention rates for Nebraska's community colleges and independent institutions were higher in fall 2015 than they were in fall 2005. For the remaining sectors, full-time retention rates were lower in fall 2015 than they were in fall 2005 or data are not sufficient to compute a sector retention rate for fall 2005.

**Figure 2.1.1**

**Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates  
of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector  
Fall 2015 Compared to Fall 2005**



*Note.* Data are insufficient to calculate the overall full-time retention rate for degree-granting for-profit/career schools for fall 2005. See [Explanatory Note A9.1](#) and [Table A9.4](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for more information on limitations of sector comparisons. See [Table A9.1](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2004, fall 2005, and fall 2015 surveys.

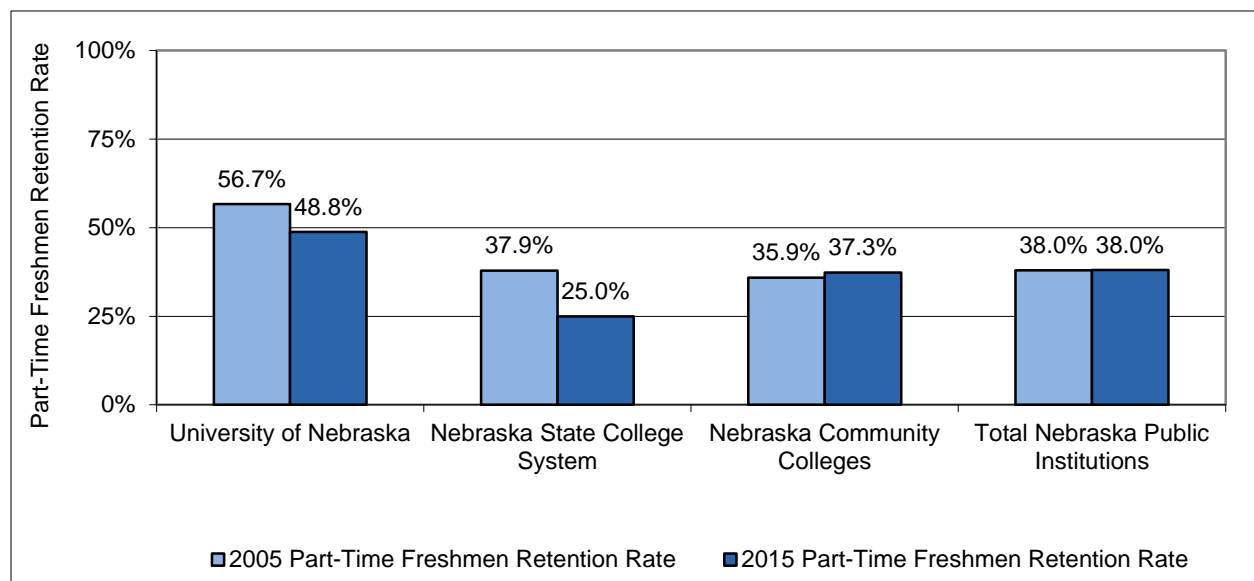
- The net effect of these changes in sector rates was that the estimated overall full-time retention rate for the three public sectors decreased 0.1 percentage point, from 72.4% in fall 2005 to 72.3% in fall 2015, while the rate for all institutions in Nebraska, excluding the degree-granting for-profit schools, decreased 0.3 percentage point, from 73.7% in fall 2005 to 73.4% in fall 2015.
- See [Table A9.1](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for data related to the calculated sector and state retention rates for full-time freshmen. See [Table A9.4](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for the full-time retention rates by institution for fall 2005 and fall 2015.

### **Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates by Sector and Institution**

As shown in [Figure 2.1.2](#), the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska’s three public sectors of higher education was 38.0% in fall 2005 and fall 2015. While the part-time retention rates for the University of Nebraska and the Nebraska State College System were much lower in fall 2015 than in fall 2005, the part-time retention rate for Nebraska’s community colleges was slightly higher in fall 2015 than in fall 2005.<sup>32</sup>

- Regardless of sector, retention rates for part-time students are much lower than those for full-time students.

**Figure 2.1.2**  
**Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates**  
**of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector**  
**Fall 2015 Compared to Fall 2005**



*Note.* The schools in the independent and for-profit/career school sectors did not provide sufficient data to calculate part-time retention rates for the sectors or for the state for fall 2005. See [Explanatory Note A9.1](#) and [Table A9.5](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for more information on limitations of sector comparisons. See [Table A9.2](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2004, fall 2005, and fall 2015 surveys.

<sup>32</sup> The Nebraska State College System and the University of Nebraska reported small numbers of part-time first-time freshmen compared to Nebraska’s community colleges. Fall 2005 retention rates are based on the following cohorts: NU = 157; NSCS = 66; CCs = 1,423. Fall 2015 retention rates are based on the following cohorts: NU = 125; NSCS = 20; CCs = 1,572.

## **Nebraska Freshmen Retention Rates Compared to Those of Other States**

The charts in this section show the fall 2015 overall freshmen retention rates for full-time and part-time freshmen enrolled at Nebraska's public four-year colleges and universities and Nebraska's six community colleges, compared to the retention rates for other states and the nation. (See Table A9.3 in Appendix 9 for supporting data.)

### **Retention Rates for Public Four-Year Institutions**

Figure 2.1.3 and Figure 2.1.4 reveal that the fall 2015 retention rates for full-time and part-time freshmen enrolled at Nebraska's public four-year institutions were below the corresponding national averages.

- As shown in Figure 2.1.3, the overall full-time retention rate for Nebraska's public four-year institutions—the University of Nebraska at Kearney, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the three institutions in the Nebraska State College System—was 78.5% in fall 2015, compared to an 81.1% retention rate for the nation.
- Nebraska's fall 2015 full-time retention rate for public four-year institutions was the 29<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation.
- As shown in Figure 2.1.4, the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska's public four-year institutions was 45.5% in fall 2015, compared to the national average of 53.9%.
- Nebraska's fall 2015 part-time retention rate for public four-year institutions was the 29<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation.

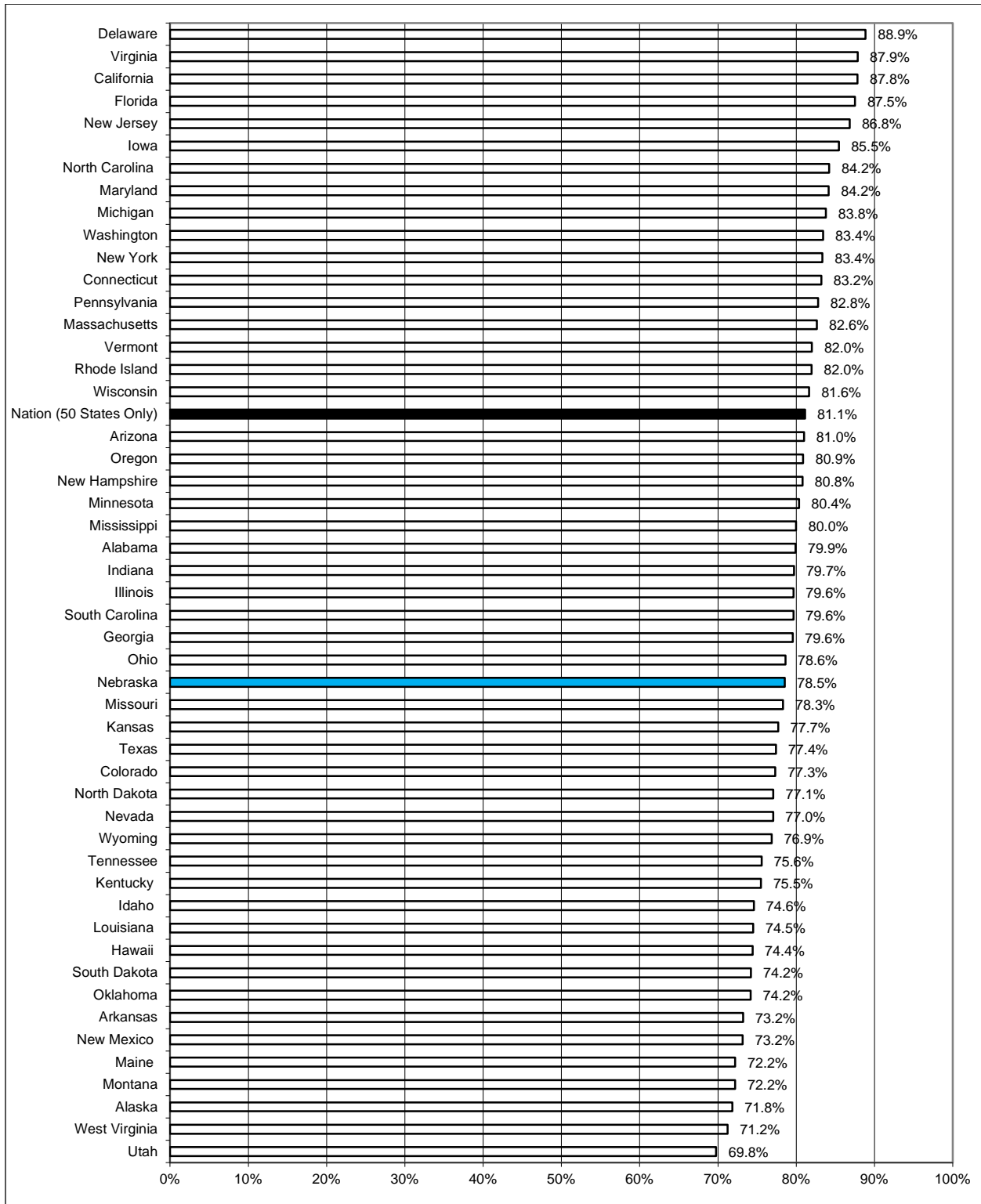
### **Retention Rates for Public Two-Year Institutions**

Figure 2.1.5 and Figure 2.1.6 compare the overall full-time and part-time freshmen retention rates for Nebraska's six community colleges to the state and national rates for all two-year public colleges. These colleges include publicly supported tribal colleges and technical colleges, as well as community colleges. Consequently, retention data for the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis (NCTA-Curtis) and the Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC) are included in the computation of the national full-time and part-time retention rates for all two-year public colleges. Data for NCTA-Curtis and the NICC are not included in the calculation of the full-time retention rate for Nebraska's six community colleges shown in Figure 2.1.5 and Figure 2.1.6.

- As shown in Figure 2.1.5, the overall full-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges was 59.7% in fall 2015, compared to a 60.9% retention rate for the nation.
- Nebraska's fall 2015 full-time retention rate for the community colleges was the 21<sup>st</sup> highest in the nation.
- As shown in Figure 2.1.6, the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges was 37.37% in fall 2015, compared to the national average of 43.2%.
- Nebraska's fall 2015 part-time retention rate for the community colleges was the 39<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation.

Figure 2.1.3

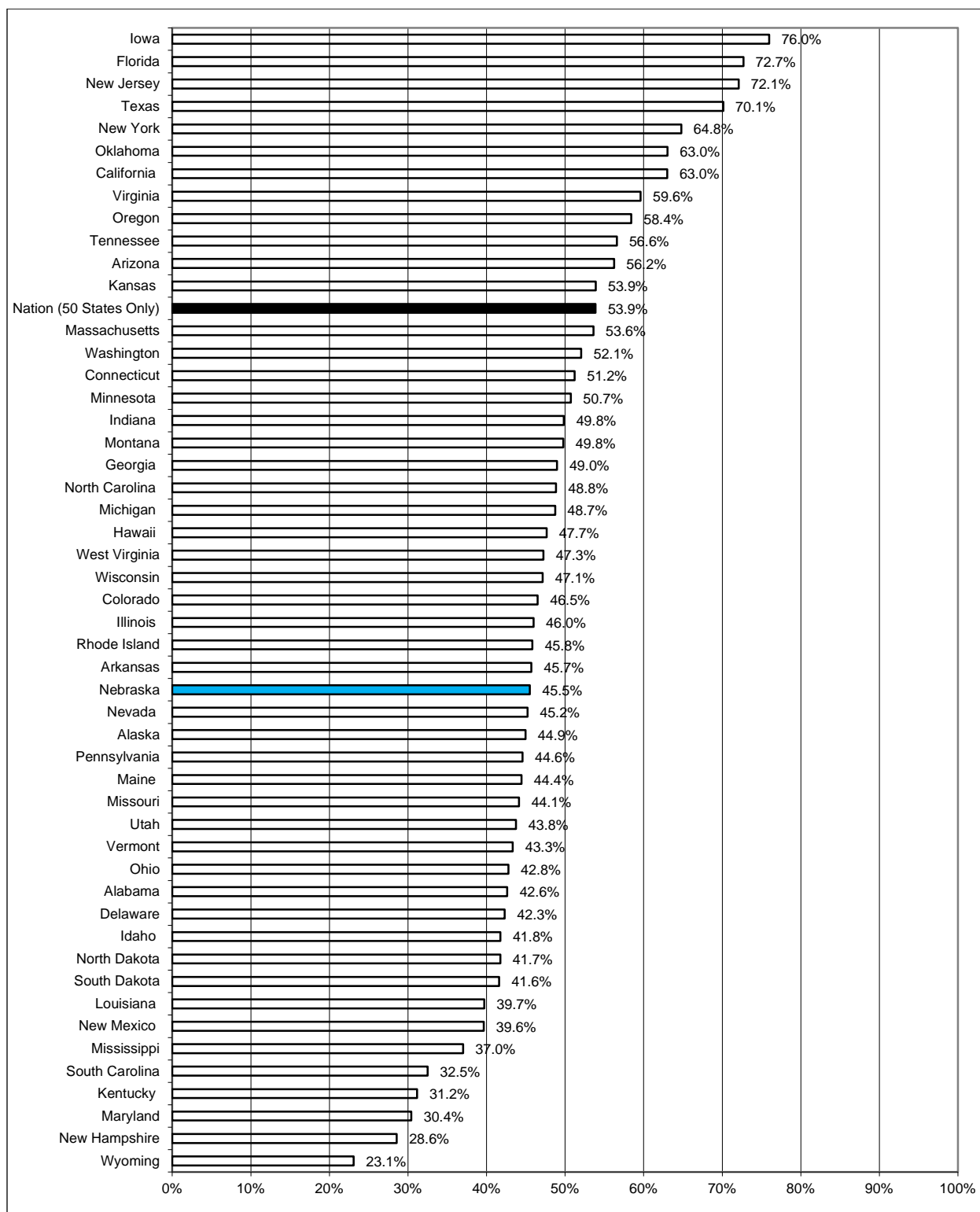
2015 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2015 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 15, 2017.

Figure 2.1.4

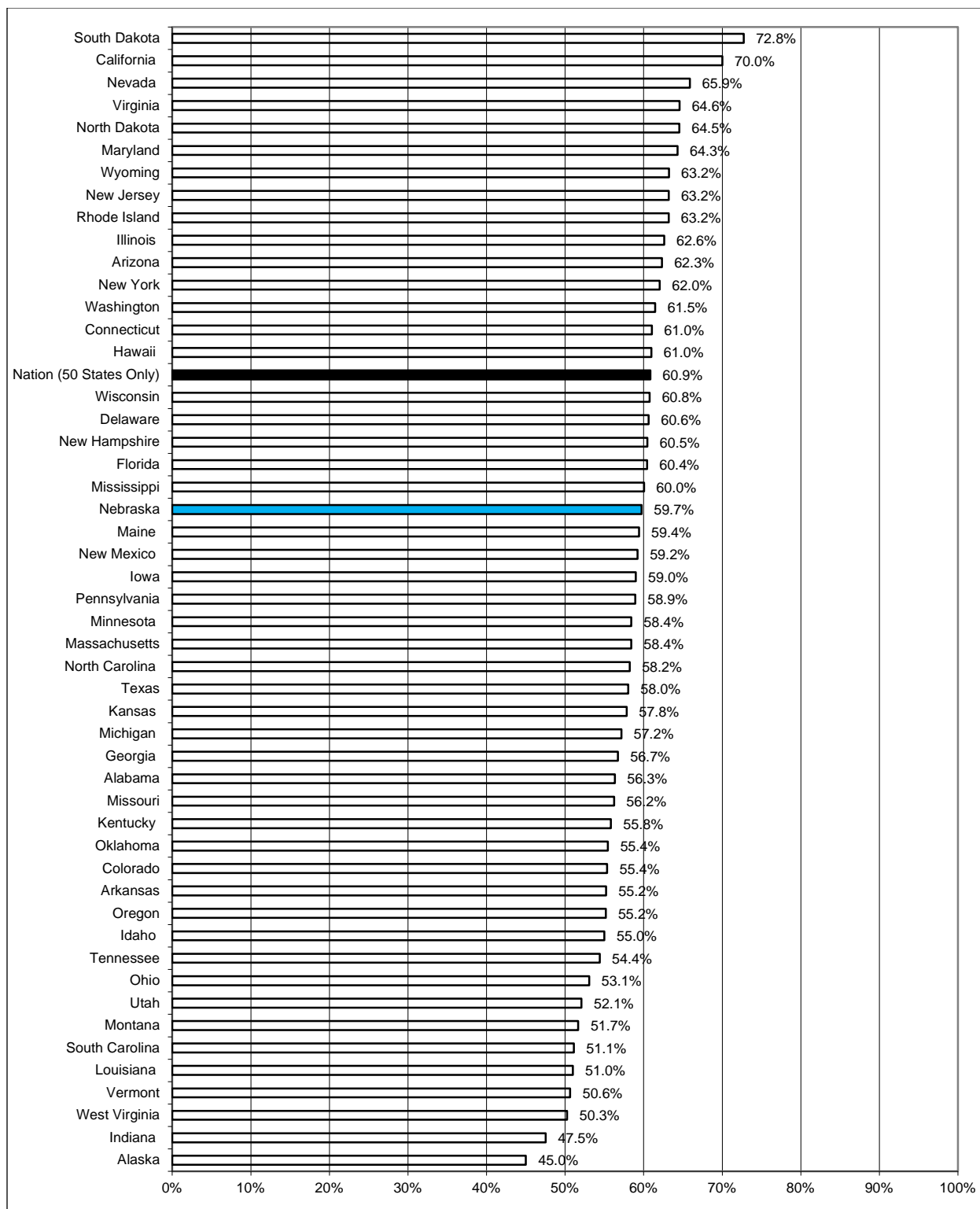
2015 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2015 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 15, 2017.

Figure 2.1.5

**2015 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State  
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)**

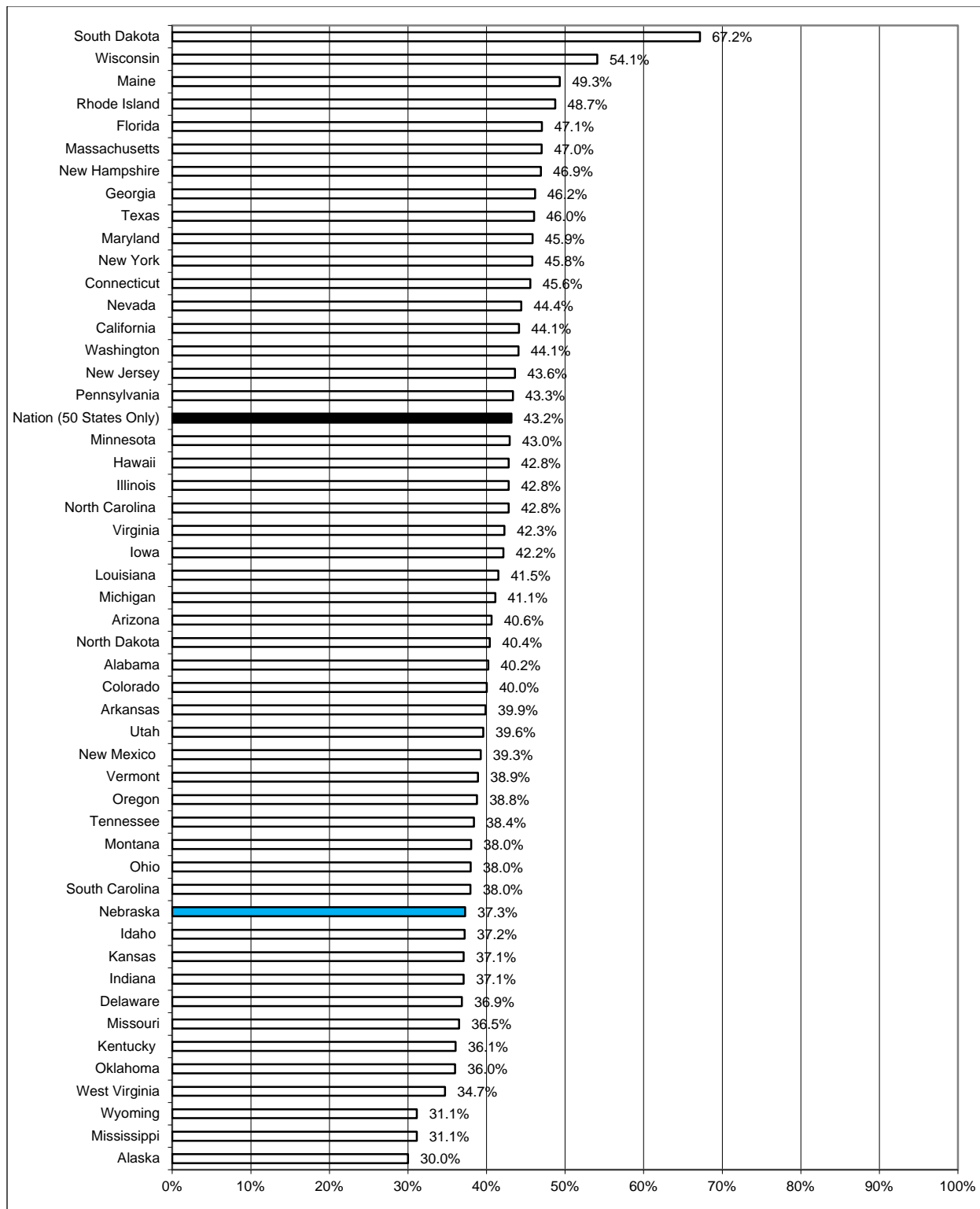


Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2015 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 15, 2017.



Figure 2.1.6

**2015 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State  
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)**



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2015 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 15, 2017.

This page left blank intentionally.