

2.3 Graduation and Persistence Rates (Based on Clearinghouse Data)

A recent study 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 2007. This 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 March 2014, this report presents the findings of the NSC's second 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. This report also 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 2003. An analysis of these records resulted in a national cohort of almost 2.4 million college students who could be classified as degree-seeking, first-time freshmen in fall 2007.³⁵ The enrollment and completion records of these students were then analyzed through the six-year period ending May 31, 2013.

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 summer 2007, and (2) did not receive a degree or certificate from any postsecondary institution prior to fall 2007. Consequently, data for 2003 through 2007 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 2007 through May 31, 2013 were required.

Unlike the previous study that focused on the fall 2006 cohort, this study included students who entered college with prior college-level experience through taking dual enrollment courses in high school. Therefore, **results for the fall 2006 cohort** (see Table A12.1.b in Appendix 12) **should not be directly compared to results discussed in this section.**

The percentage of Nebraska's two-year and four-year institutions with Clearinghouse records dating back to 2003 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 94.5%. Nebraska's two-year public colleges included five of the state's six community colleges and no other two-year public institutions, resulting in a historical data coverage rate of 99.8%. (The Nebraska institutions included in the study are listed in Table A12.2.a in Appendix 12 of this report.) The Nebraska cohort included 19,705 degree-seeking first-time freshmen—6,173 started college at two-year institutions, 8,747 started college at four-year public institutions, and 4,785 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 2007 enrollment is defined as enrollment during any term beginning August 15, or the Monday before August 15, through October 31, inclusive. If no term started between these dates, the term that started between July 14 and August 14 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 15, 2008, or be enrolled at least half time for at least two terms before December 31, 2008. Because of low coverage, high rates of stop-out, and other limitations, this study excluded students whose last enrollment record was at a two-year private for-profit institution in Nebraska and New York.

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 (less than 20, 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.

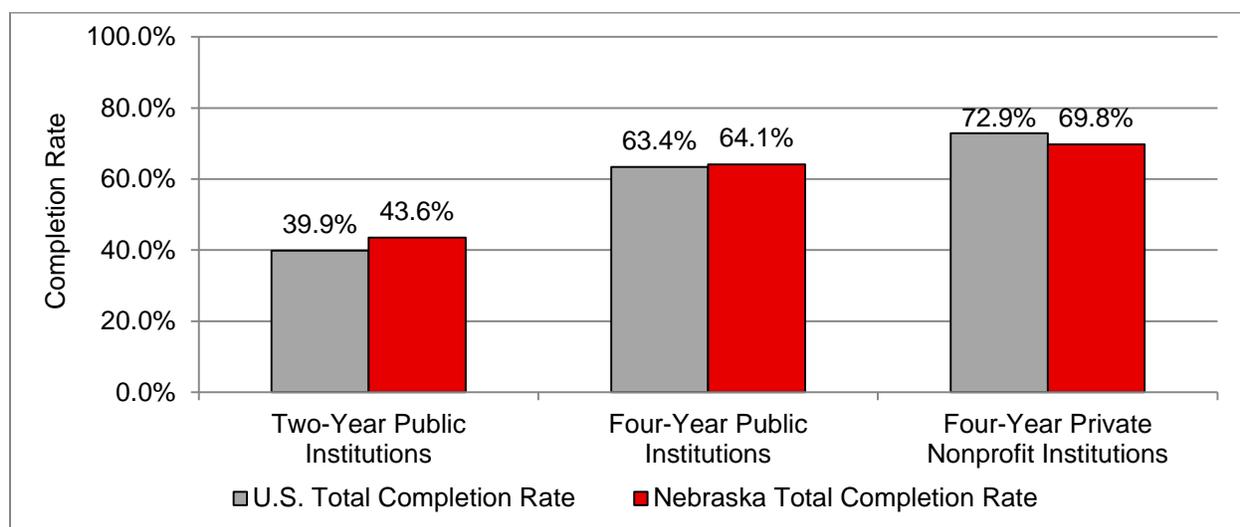
Nebraska Completion and Persistence Rates Compared to National Rates

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.

- Degree-seeking, first-time freshmen at Nebraska's two-year institutions had a 43.6% total completion rate, which was 3.7 percentage points higher than the 39.9% national rate for two-year public institutions.
- For Nebraska's four-year public institutions, the total completion rate was 64.1%, which was slightly higher than the national rate of 63.4%.
- While Nebraska's four-year private nonprofit institutions had a higher total completion rate of 69.8% compared to other Nebraska institutions, this rate was lower than the national rate of 72.9% 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 2007)



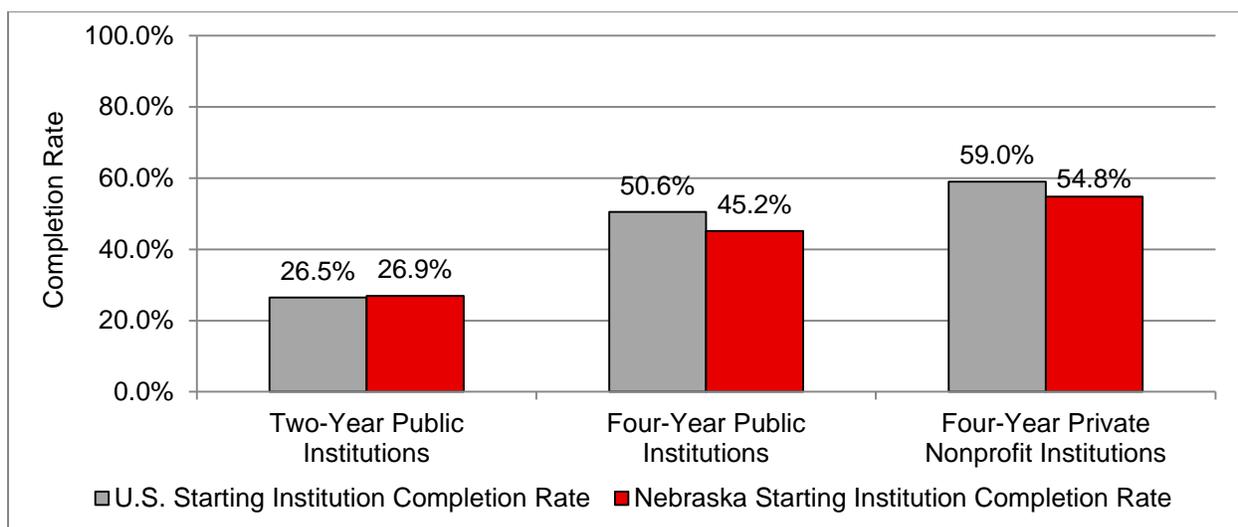
Note. See Table A12.2.b in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

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 first completion at starting institution rate for Nebraska's two-year institutions was significantly lower than the rates for the four-year institutions, but the 26.9% completion rate for the two-year institutions is essentially the same as the 26.5% 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 2007)



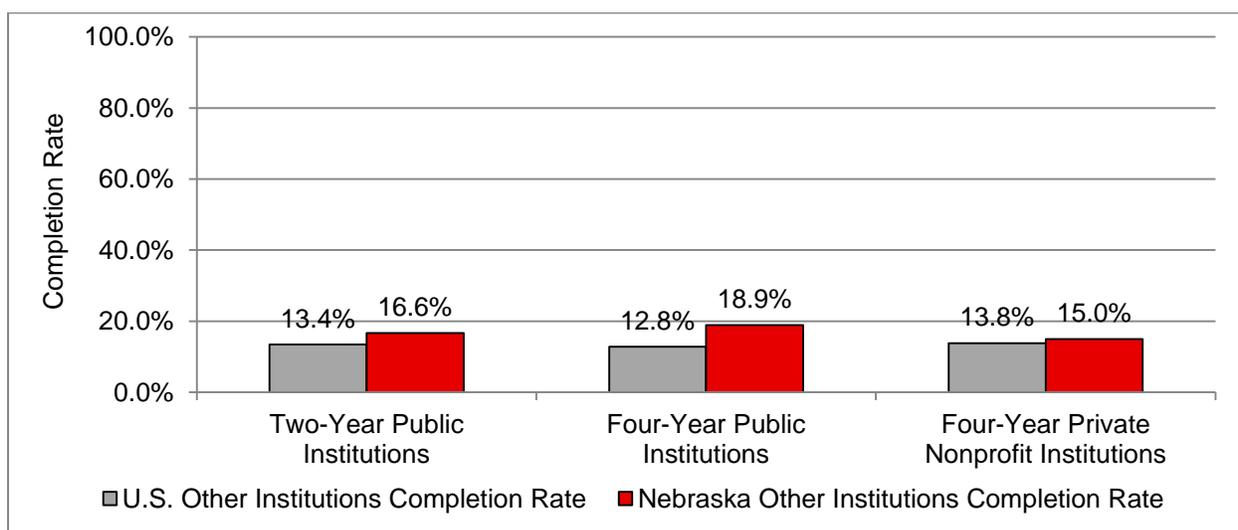
Note. See Table A12.2.b in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

As shown in Figure 2.3.3 the Clearinghouse study confirms that a notable percentage of freshmen start college at one institution and then transfer to another school where they complete a program of study.

- 15% to 19% of the first-time students at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions in fall 2007 graduated from two-year or four-year schools to which they had transferred.
- In all sectors, Nebraska’s percentages were higher than the comparable national rates.

Figure 2.3.3

Six-Year “Other Institutions” Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2007)

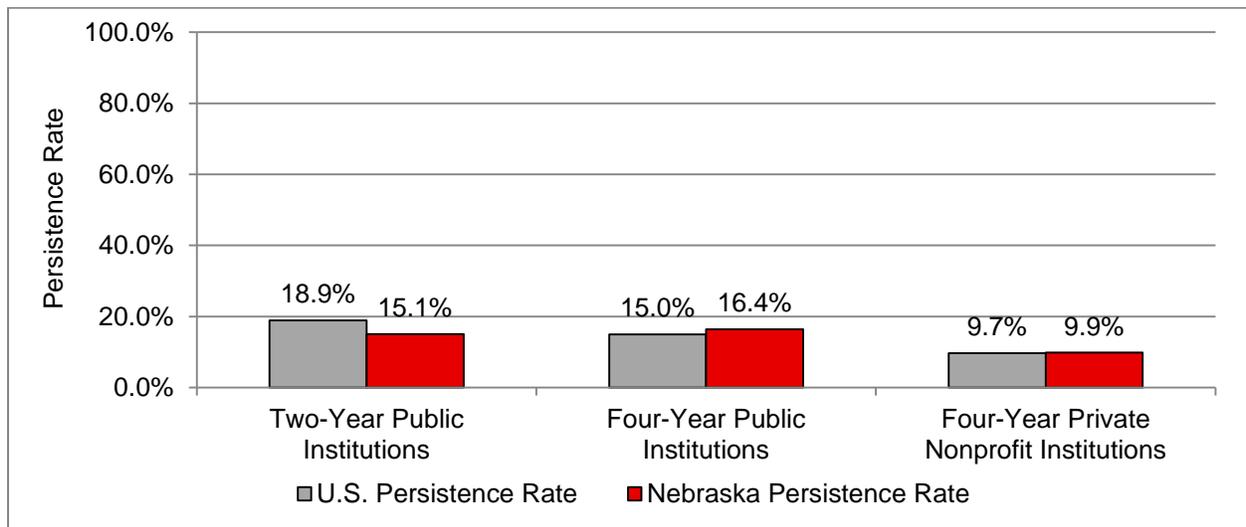


Note. See Table A12.2.b in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.4](#), 10% to 16% of the students who started college at Nebraska’s two-year and four-year public institutions were still enrolled at these or other institutions during 2012.
- The lower persistence rate of 9.9% for Nebraska’s four-year private nonprofit schools is a reflection of the fact that these institutions had a total completion rate that was higher than the total completion rates for the state’s two-year and four-year public institutions.
- Nebraska’s persistence rate for two-year public institutions was 3.8 percentage points 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 2007)



Note. See [Table A12.2.b](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

Nebraska Student Outcomes Compared 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

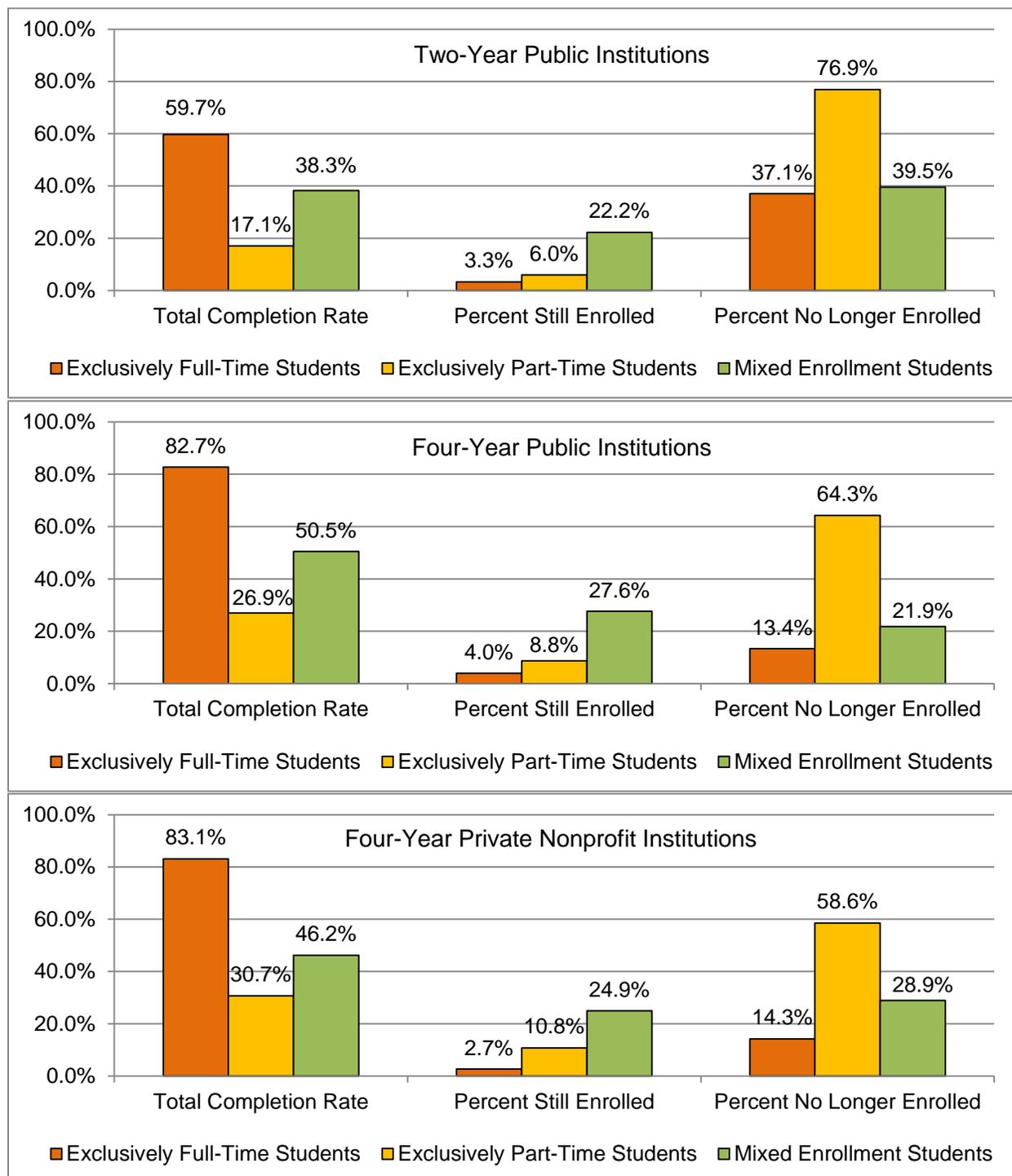
- Figure 2.3.5 shows that exclusively part-time students had total completion rates that were significantly lower than the completion rates for exclusively full-time students or mixed enrollment students, regardless of whether they started college at two-year public, four-year public, or four-year private nonprofit institutions in Nebraska.
- The six-year persistence rates (i.e., the percentage of students 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. However, 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.
- 76.9% of the exclusively part-time students who started college at Nebraska's two-year public institutions (community colleges) had not earned degrees or certificates and were no longer in college at the end of six years. Of the exclusively part-time students at Nebraska's four-year public institutions, 64.3% were no longer in college, and for the four-year private nonprofit institutions, 58.6% of the exclusively part-time students had dropped out of college before earning degrees or certificates.
- The percentages of exclusively full-time students and mixed enrollment students who left college before degree completion were much lower than the percentages of exclusively part-time students. However, 37.1% of the exclusively full-time students who started at Nebraska's two-year public colleges had not earned academic awards and were no longer in college. This percentage dropped to 13.4% for the four-year public institutions and to 14.3% for the four-year private nonprofit schools.

Student Outcomes Compared Across Sectors

- Figure 2.3.6 shows the same percentages that are presented in the series of charts in Figure 2.3.5. However, the charts in Figure 2.3.6 directly compare the student outcomes for the three types of institutions included in this study within each of the three student enrollment groups. Using this type of comparison, Figure 2.3.6 shows that the completion, persistence, and dropout rates of the students who initially enrolled at Nebraska's four-year public and private nonprofit institutions were generally similar. However, these outcomes were noticeably different than the outcomes of students who started college at Nebraska's two-year public institutions.
- In general, the comparisons in Figure 2.3.6 are evidence that students who enroll initially at four-year institutions—public or private nonprofit—are more likely to earn degrees or certificates, or at least persist in their studies, than students who start college at two-year institutions, regardless of whether they enroll full-time or part-time.

Figure 2.3.5

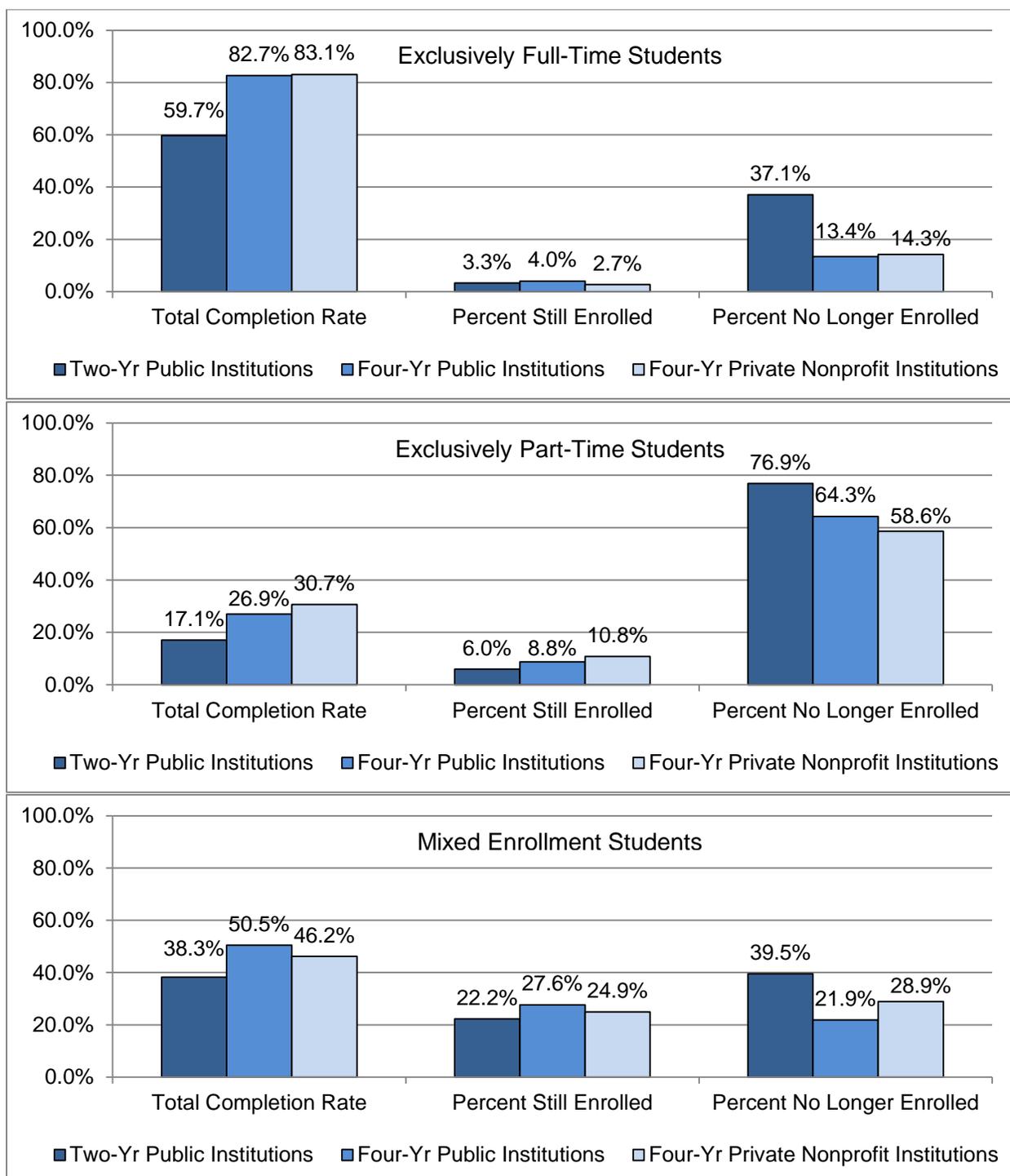
Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Student Enrollment Status for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2007)



Note. See [Table A12.2.b](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

Figure 2.3.6

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Student Enrollment Status and Sector for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2007)



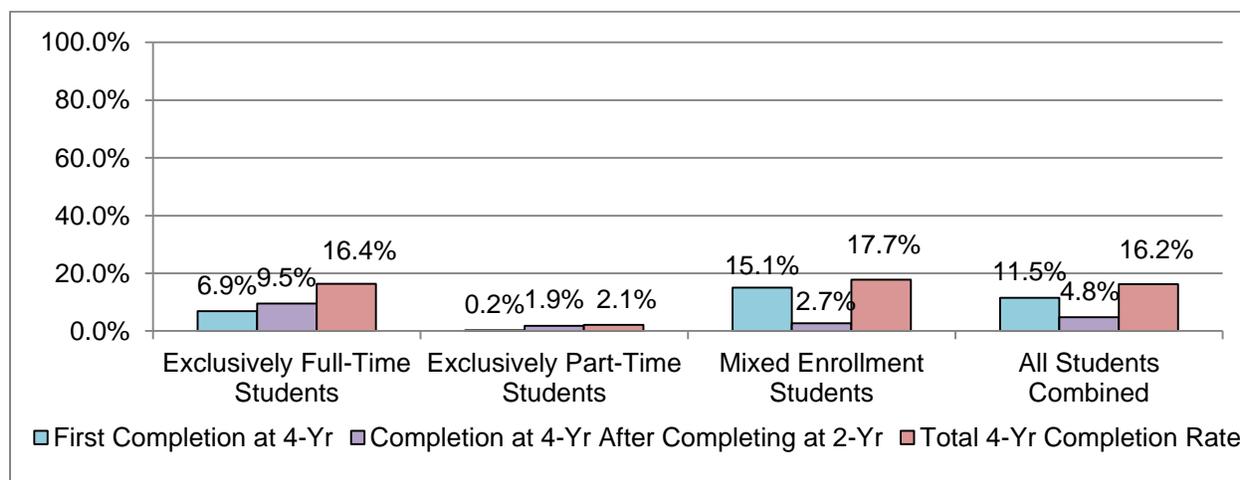
Note. See [Table A12.2.b](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

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 2.3.7](#), 16.2% of the students who initially enrolled at Nebraska’s two-year public colleges in fall 2007 had earned degrees from four-year institutions over the course of the next six years. For 11.5% of the cohort, these degrees were their first completions. For 4.8% 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 only 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 very similar.

Figure 2.3.7

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 2007)



Note. See [Table A12.2.b](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

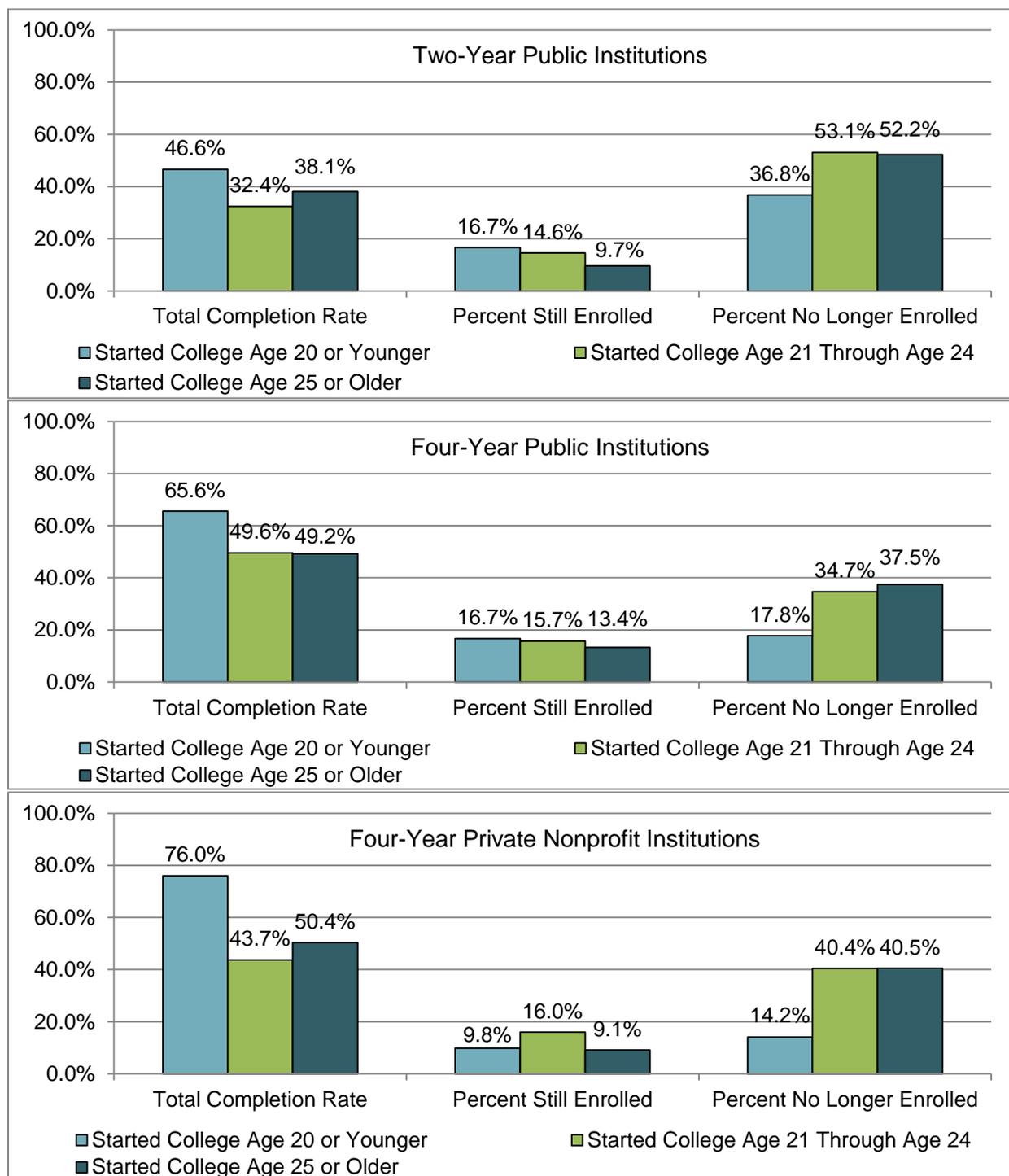
Nebraska Student Outcomes Compared by Age Group

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.8](#), students who started college when they are 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 whether they initially enrolled at two-year public, four-year public, or four-year private nonprofit institutions.
- Interestingly, students who started college when they were age 21 through age 24 were less likely to complete degrees at two-year public institutions or at four-year private nonprofit institutions than students who started college when they were 25 years or older.

- The highest total completion rate for the students 20 years of age or younger was 76.0% at the four-year private nonprofit schools, while the highest total completion rate for students 21 through 24 was 49.6% at the four-year public institutions, and the highest total completion rate for students 25 or older was 50.4% at four-year private nonprofit schools.

Figure 2.3.8

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Age Group for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2007)



Note. See Table A12.2.b in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.

Nebraska Student Outcomes Compared by Gender

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.9](#), the completion rates for male and female students at Nebraska's two-year public institutions were essentially the same (43.9% for men versus 43.1% for women). However, at four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions, females were much more likely than men to have completed degrees or certificate programs within six years.
- 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 were higher for males than for females.

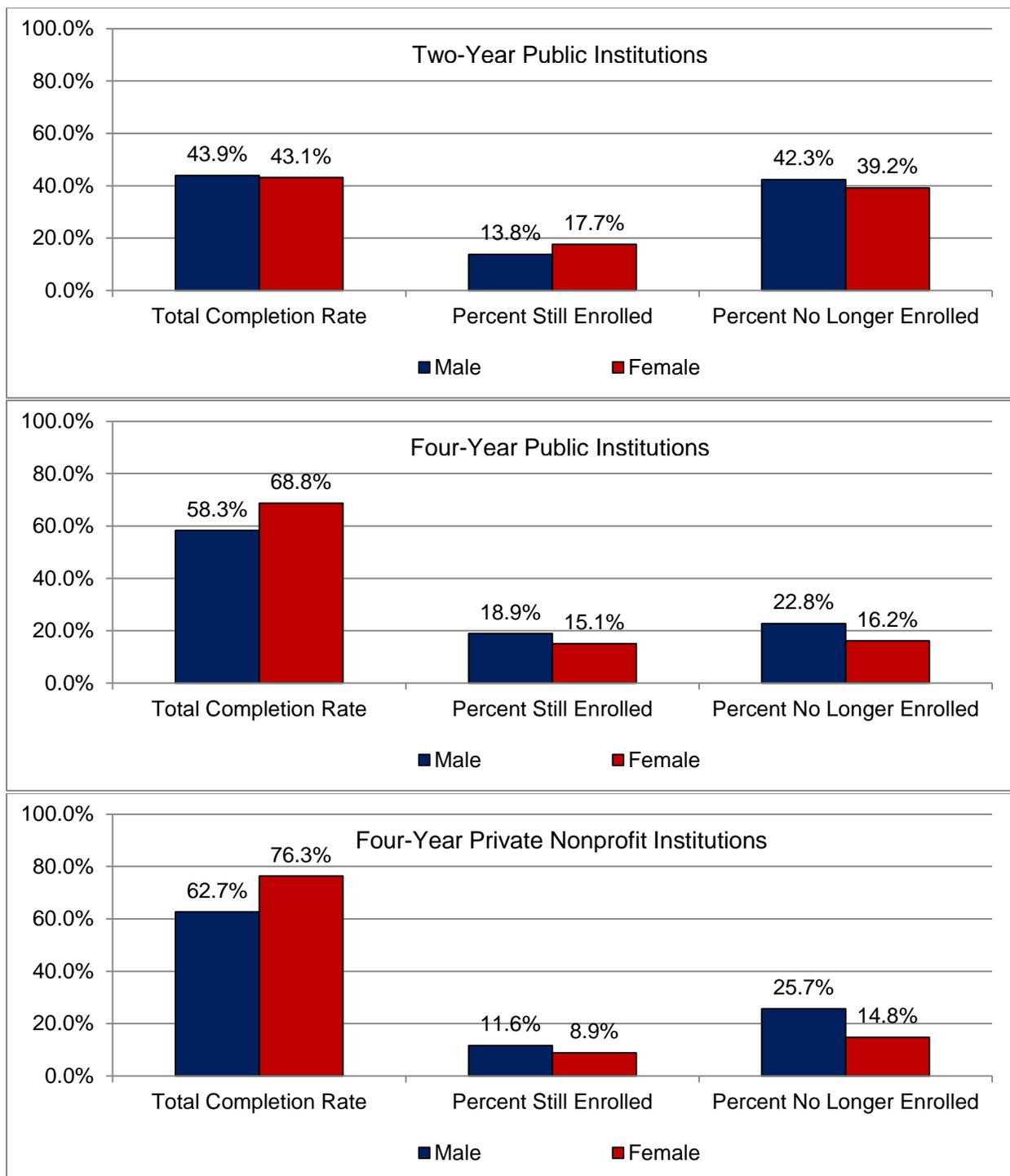
Conclusion

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.b](#) 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. This study is not without limitations. However, it provides 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 2.3.9

Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Gender for First-Time Degree-Seeking Freshmen (Fall 2007)



Note. See [Table A12.2.b](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates*, March 2014.