

Section 2

Increasing College Retention and Graduation Rates

Priority 2. Increasing 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 and successfully persist through degree completion. 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.

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 reported to the NCES or 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 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.

Freshmen retention rates based on IPEDS data are reported for full-time and part-time students. Graduation and transfer rates that are available through IPEDS are based on the same cohort of full-time, first-time freshmen. No information about the graduation rates or transfers of part-time students can be obtained using IPEDS data.

A transfer rate is the percentage of students in a school's full-time, first-time freshmen cohort who transfer to other institutions. However, IPEDS data are not available to determine if transfer students persist in their studies and graduate from the institutions to which they transfer.

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.

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.

To overcome the limitations of the data available from the NCES and directly address the third strategic objective recommended by the 2003 LR 174 Task Force, the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska State College System, Nebraska's community colleges, and Commission staff conducted an extensive research project in 2006 using data obtained through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Based on the 2006 NSC Research Project, about 11% of full-time freshmen and 14% of part-time freshmen at Nebraska's public institutions transferred to other schools. At least 10% of full-time freshmen who enrolled in bachelor's degree programs at the University of Nebraska or state colleges earned bachelor's degrees after transferring to other institutions. The study also found that about 19% of students initially enrolled in academic transfer programs completed a bachelor's degree within six years, while about 16% completed the academic transfer program but did not transfer to a four-year institution. About 4.4% of students in academic transfer programs earned degrees/certificates at other institutions.

A full report of the 2006 NSC Research Project is in Section 2 of the *2007 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report*, which is available on the Coordinating Commission's website: www.ccpe.ne.gov. Until this type of research is replicated in Nebraska, this progress report will continue to provide policy-makers with an annual analysis of retention, graduation and transfer rates based on NCES-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 colleges, 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)

Decrease the percentage of students who fail to 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), beginning in fall 2004. The NCES generally defines a retention rate as the percentage of the first-time freshmen who enrolled at an institution during the fall semester (or quarter) or the preceding summer of a given academic year and were enrolled at the same institution during the fall semester (or quarter) one year later. Separate retention rates are reported by institutions for their full-time and part-time students.

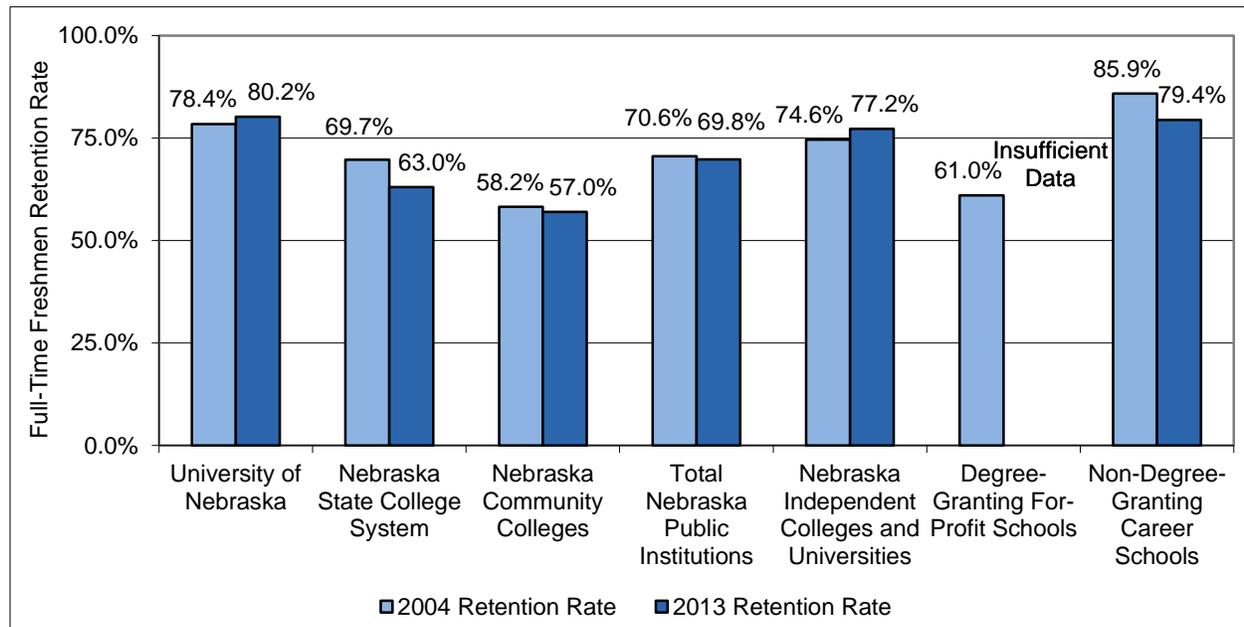
The latest available data to compare to fall 2004 freshmen retention rates are for fall 2013. Retention rates for fall 2014 will not be available until mid-2015 and will be reported in the *2016 Progress Report*.

Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates by Sector and Institution

Figure 2.1.1 shows that full-time freshmen retention rates for the Nebraska State College System, Nebraska's community colleges, and the non-degree-granting career schools were lower in fall 2013 than they were in fall 2004. For the remaining sectors, full-time retention rates were higher in fall 2013 than they were in fall 2004 or data are not sufficient to compute a sector retention rate for fall 2013.

Figure 2.1.1

**Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates
of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector
Fall 2013 Compared to Fall 2004 Baseline**



Note. See [Table A9.1](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data. Data source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), fall 2004 and 2013 surveys.

- The overall full-time retention rate for the degree-granting, for-profit schools was 61.0% in fall 2004. However, data are insufficient to calculate an equivalent rate for fall 2013 because only three of the schools in this sector reported full-time retention rates for fall 2013 that are comparable to the rates reported for fall 2004. See the footnotes for [Table A9.1](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for more details.
- The net effect of these changes in sector rates was that the estimated overall full-time retention rate for the three public sectors decreased 0.8 percentage points, from 70.6% in fall 2004 to 69.8% in fall 2013, while the rate for all institutions in Nebraska, excluding the degree-granting, for-profit schools, decreased 0.7 percentage points, from 72.1% in fall 2004 to 71.4% in fall 2013.
- 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 and sector for fall 2004 and fall 2013.

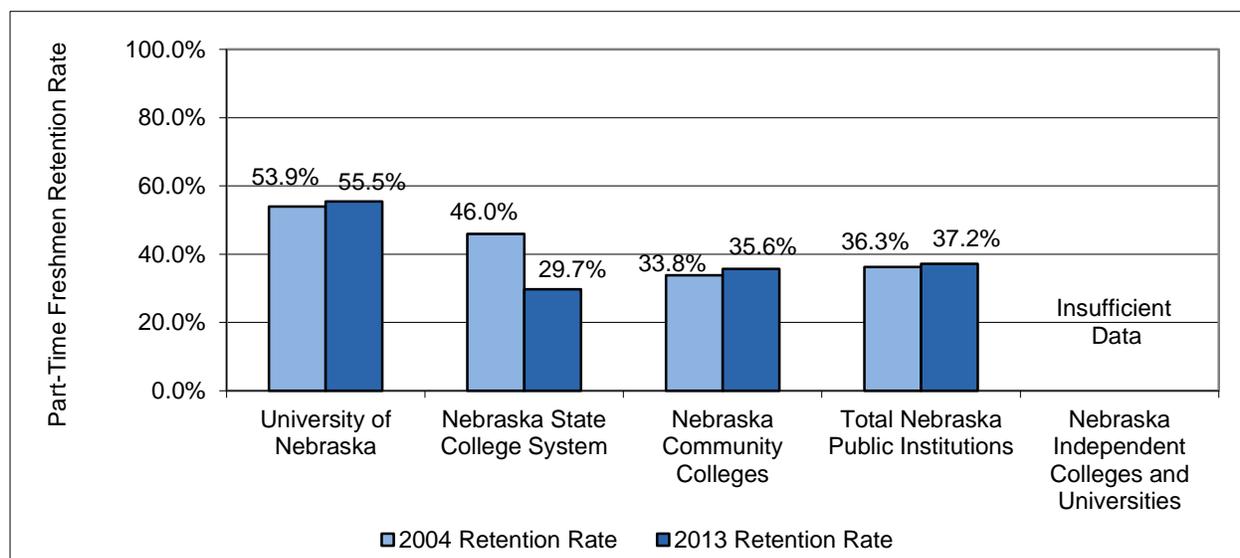
Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates by Sector and Institution

[Figure 2.1.2](#) shows that the part-time freshmen retention rate for the Nebraska State College System was much lower in fall 2013 than in fall 2004. For the University of Nebraska and Nebraska’s community colleges, part-time retention rates were slightly higher in fall 2013 than they were in fall 2004.

- Due to insufficient data from institutions in the independent and for-profit sectors, an overall part-time retention rate for the state cannot be computed for these sectors. However, it can be estimated that the overall part-time retention rate for the three public sectors—the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska State College System and Nebraska’s community colleges—increased 0.9 percentage points, from 36.3% in fall 2004 to 37.2% in fall 2013.

Figure 2.1.2

Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector Fall 2013 Compared to Fall 2004 Baseline



Note. See [Table A9.2](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data. Data source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), fall 2004 and 2013 surveys.

- Retention rates for part-time students in all sectors are much lower than those for full-time students.
- See [Table A9.2](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for data related to the calculated sector rates for part-time freshmen and [Table A9.5](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for part-time retention rates by institution.

Nebraska Freshmen Retention Rates Compared to Those of Other States

The charts in this section show the fall 2013 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.

Retention rates reported in [Appendix 9](#) may differ slightly from those reported in [Figure 2.1.3](#) through [Figure 2.1.10](#). [Appendix 9](#) retention rates are estimates, computed by multiplying the retention rate reported by each institution times the number of first-time freshmen who were enrolled the previous fall. Retention rates shown in [Figure 2.1.3](#) through [Figure 2.1.10](#) are computed by dividing the reported number of retained students by the adjusted fall cohort for first-time freshmen who were enrolled the previous fall. Please see the [Technical Note](#) in [Table A9.3](#) for further information.

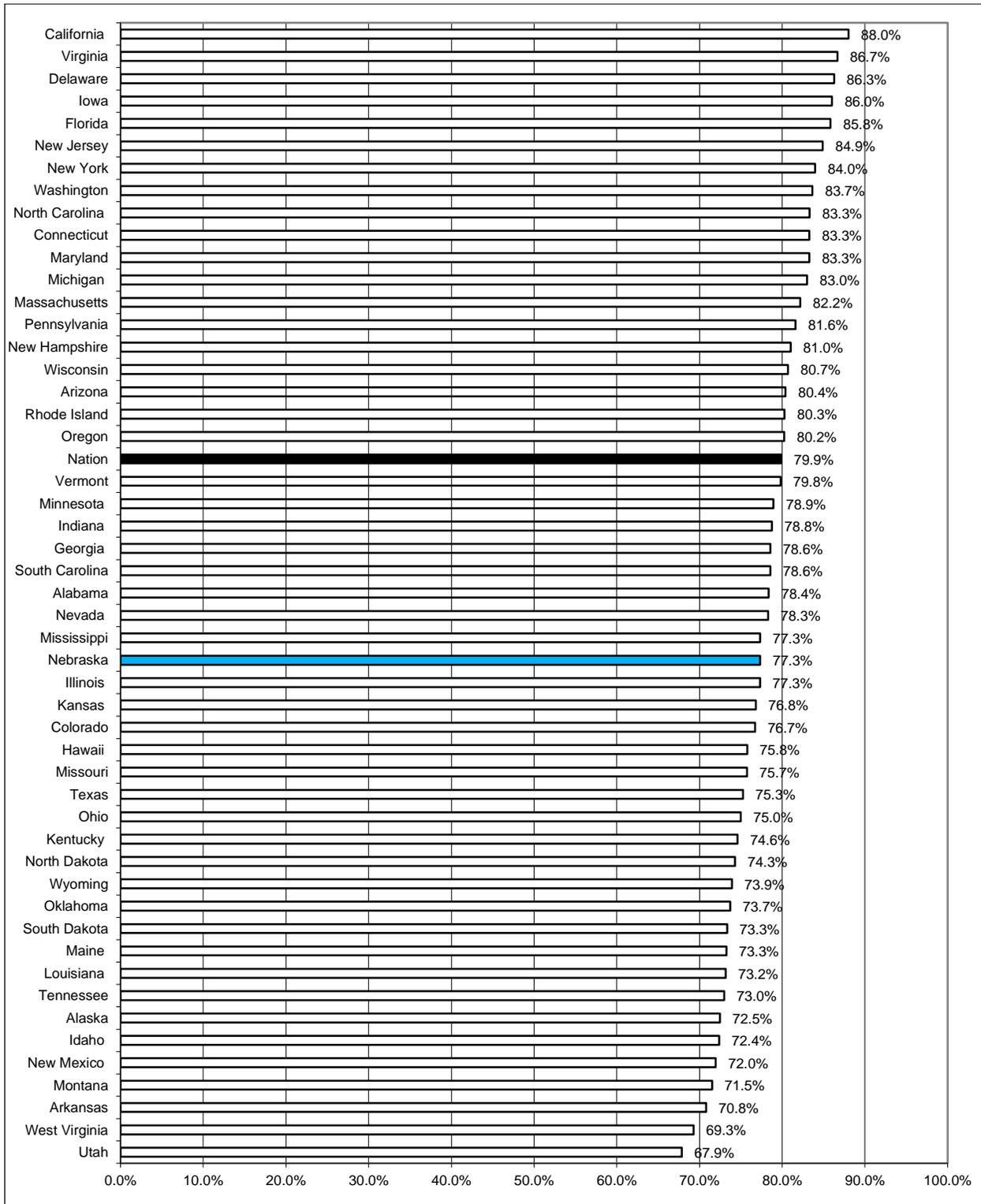
Retention Rates for Public Four-Year Institutions

[Figure 2.1.3](#) reveals that the 2013 retention rate for full-time freshmen enrolled at Nebraska's public four-year institutions was below the corresponding national average. However, the 2013 retention rate for part-time freshmen enrolled at Nebraska's public four-year institutions was higher than the corresponding national average (see [Figure 2.1.4](#)).

- 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 77.3% in fall 2013, compared to a 79.9% retention rate for the nation.
- Since 2005, when national comparisons became available, Nebraska's full-time retention rate for public four-year institutions has decreased 2.1 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 2.2 percentage points (see [Figure 2.1.5](#)).
- Nebraska's 2013 full-time retention rate for public four-year institutions was the 28th 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 51.7% in fall 2013, compared to the national average of 50.2%.
- Since 2005, Nebraska's part-time retention rate for public four-year institutions has decreased 0.2 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 1.6 percentage points (see [Figure 2.1.6](#)).
- Nebraska's 2013 part-time retention rate for public four-year institutions was the 14th highest in the nation.

Figure 2.1.3

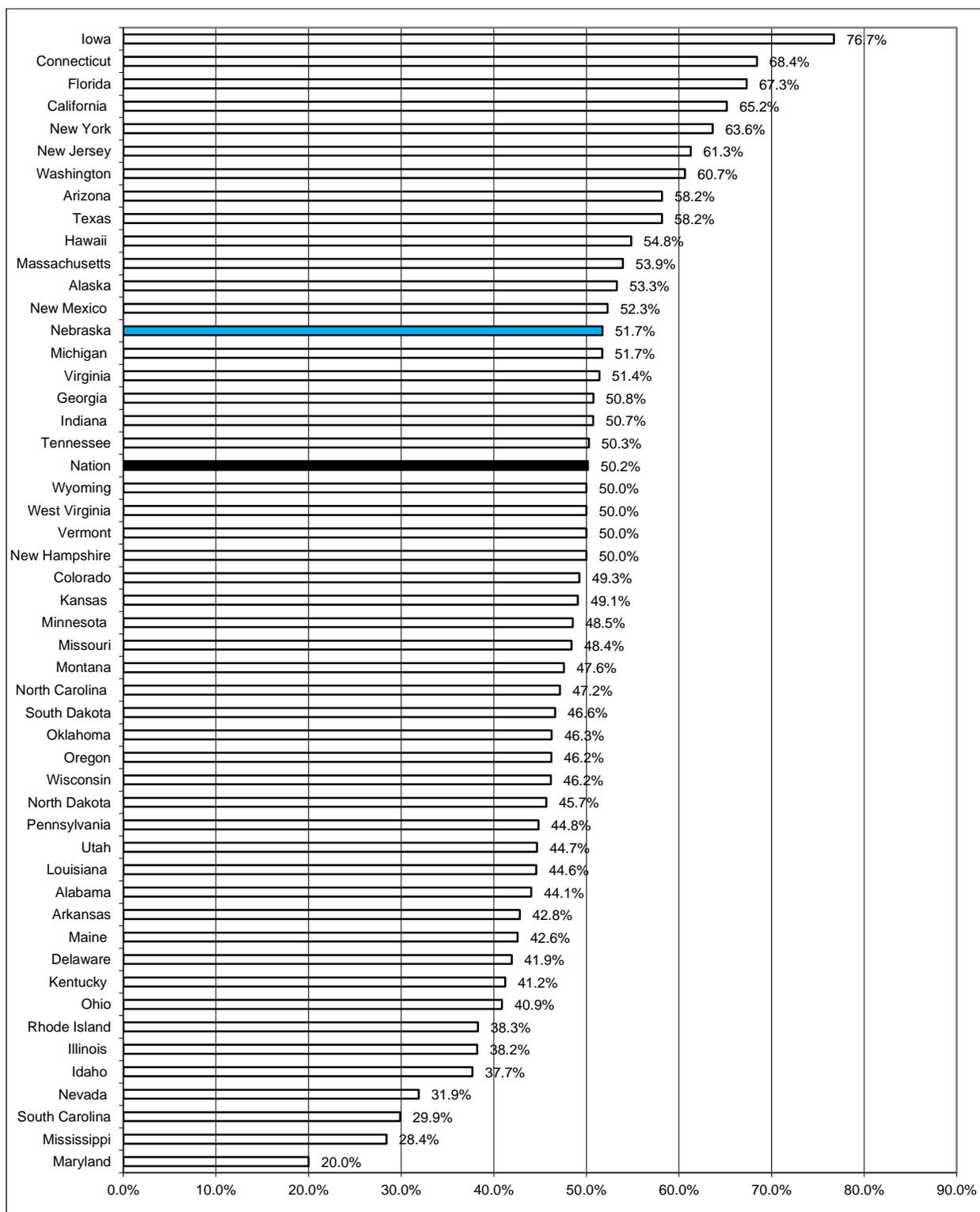
2013 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.4

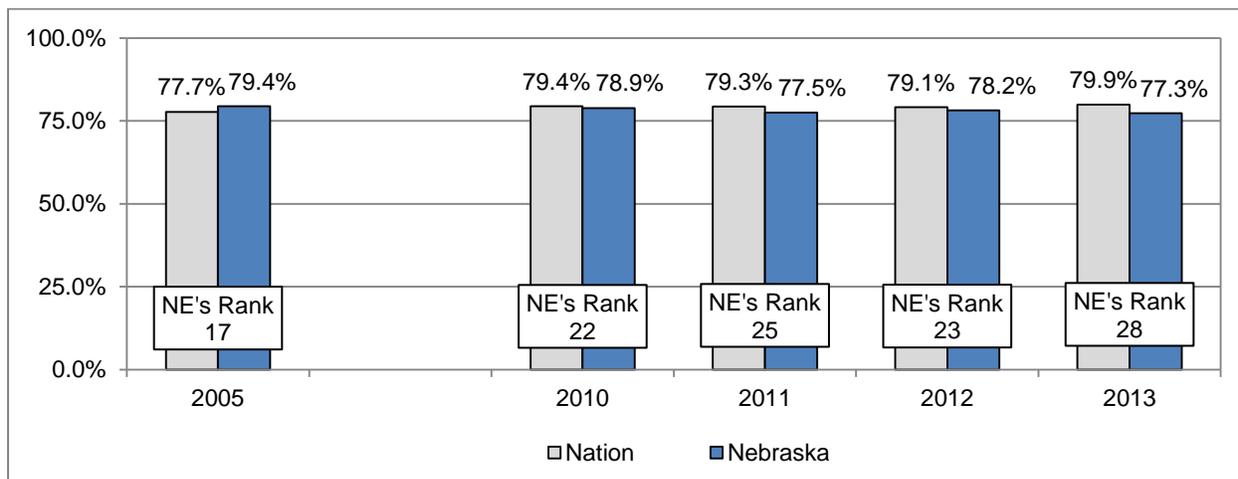
2013 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.5

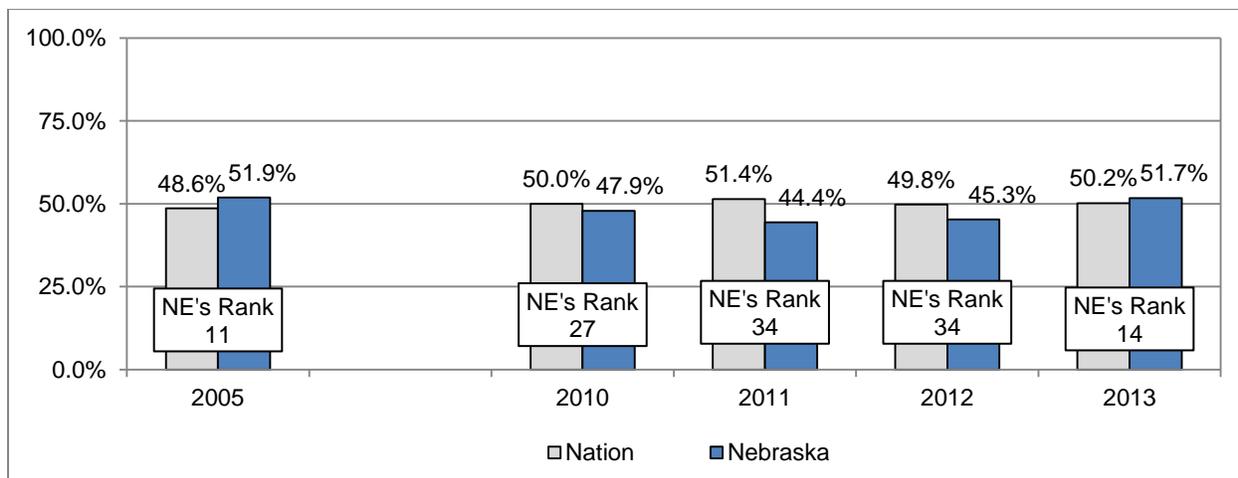
Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions for Nebraska and the United States 2010 Through 2013 Compared to 2005



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.6

Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions for Nebraska and the United States 2010 Through 2013 Compared to 2005



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

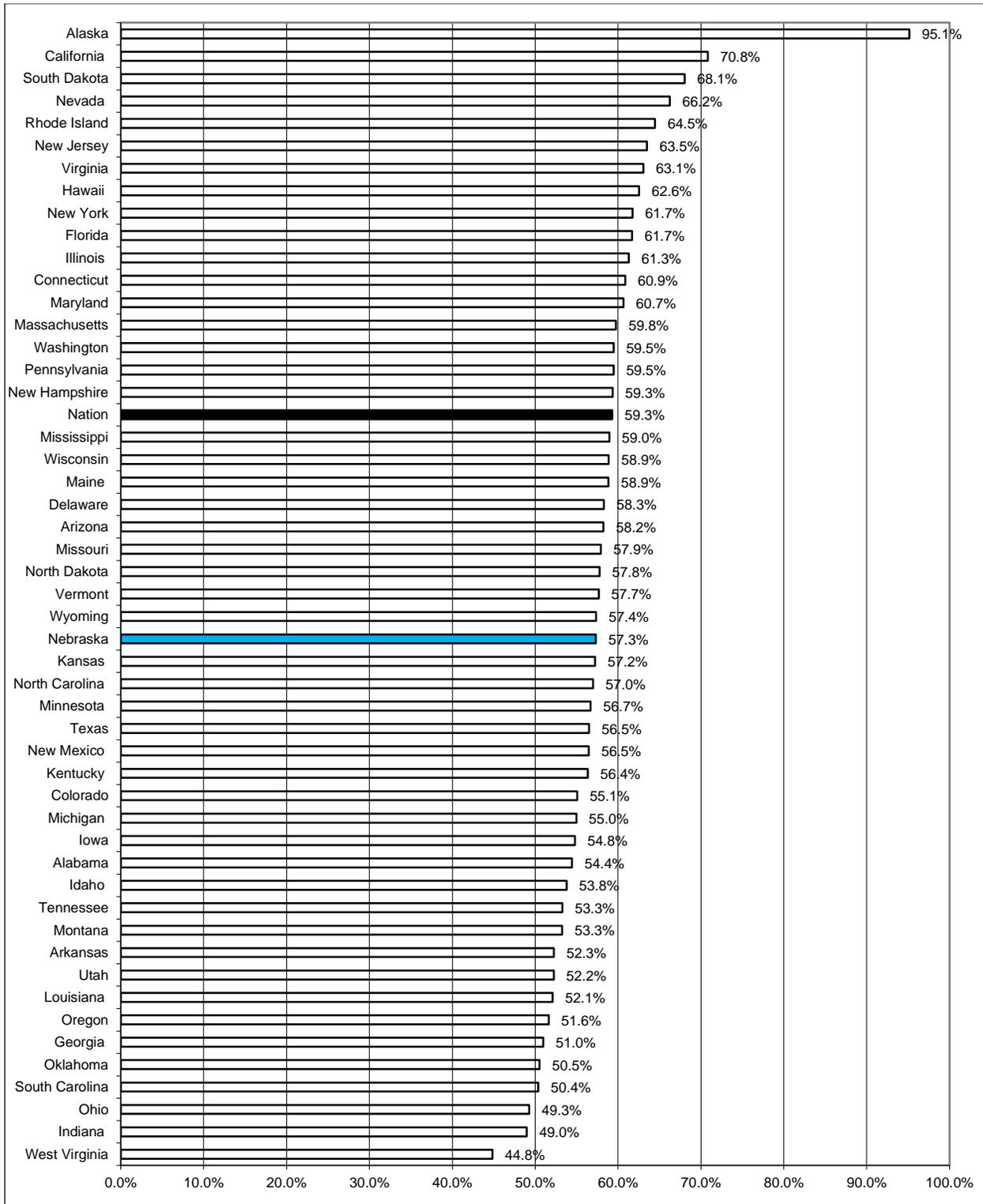
Retention Rates for Public Two-Year Institutions

Figure 2.1.7, through Figure 2.10 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), which is federally supported, are included in the computation of the national full-time and part-time retention rates for all two-year public colleges. Data for the 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 2.1.7 through Figure 2.1.10.

- As shown in Figure 2.1.7, the overall full-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges was 57.3% in fall 2013, compared to a 59.3% retention rate for the nation.
- Since 2005, Nebraska's full-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges has decreased 4.2 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 1.0 percentage point (see Figure 2.1.9).
- Nebraska's 2013 full-time retention rate for the community colleges was the 27th highest in the nation.
- As shown in Figure 2.1.8, the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges was 35.5% in fall 2013, compared to the national average of 42.9%.
- Since 2005, Nebraska's part-time retention rate for public two-year institutions has decreased 3.5 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 2.3 percentage points (see Figure 2.1.10).
- Nebraska's 2013 part-time retention rate for the community colleges was the 42nd highest in the nation.

Figure 2.1.7

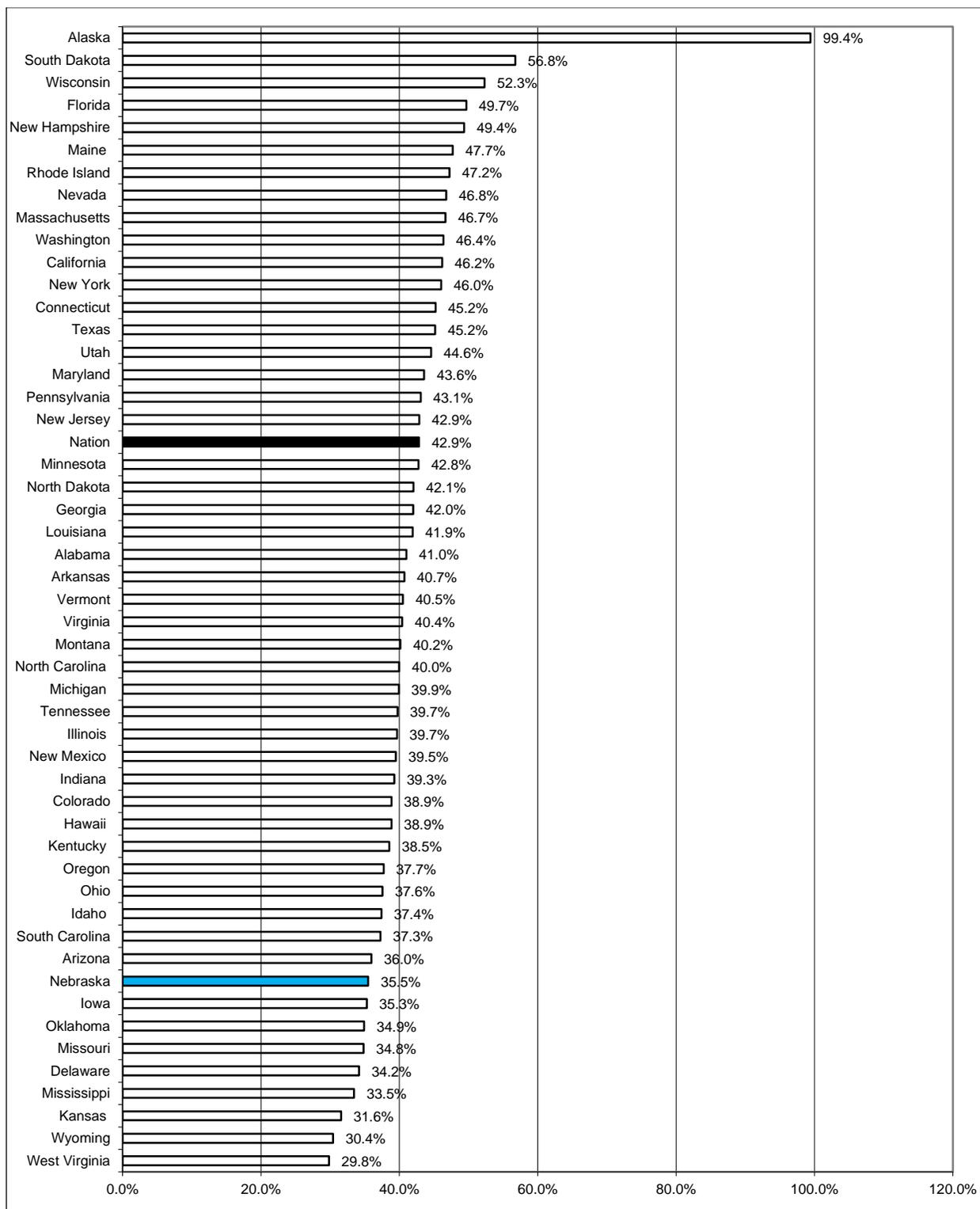
**2013 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)**



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.8

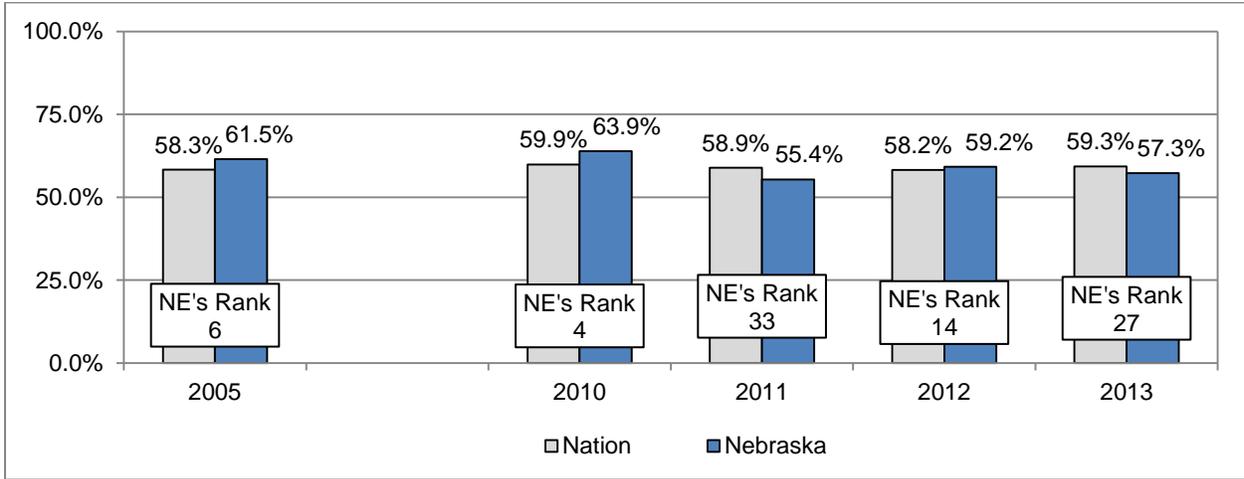
**2013 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State
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Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.9

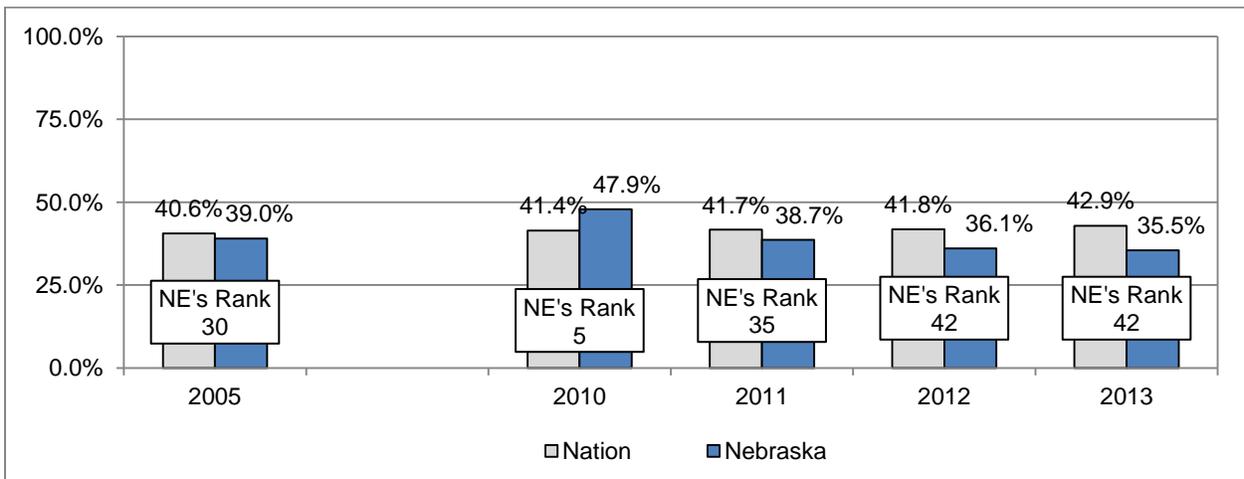
Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions
for Nebraska and the United States
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)
2010 Through 2013 Compared to 2005



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.10

Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions
for Nebraska and the United States
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)
2010 Through 2013 Compared to 2005



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2013 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, February 18, 2015 (before imputation).