

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.³¹

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

³¹ 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 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)

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), beginning in fall 2004. 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.

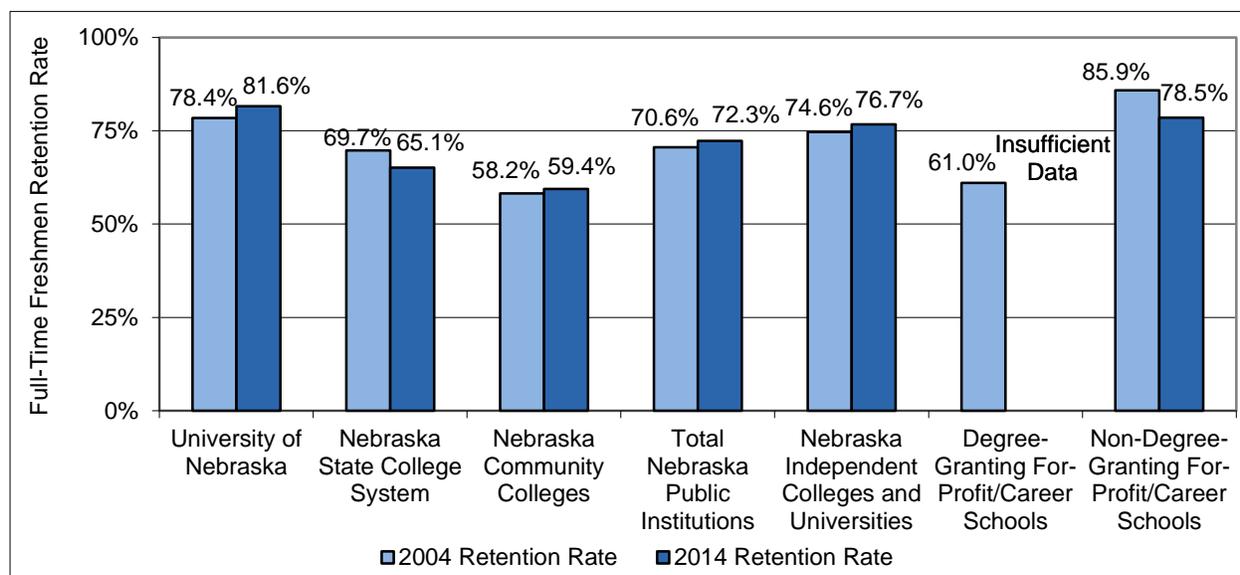
The latest available data to compare to fall 2004 freshmen retention rates are for fall 2014. Retention rates for fall 2015 will not be available until mid-2016 and will be reported in the *2017 Progress Report*.

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 and the non-degree-granting career schools were lower in fall 2014 than they were in fall 2004. For the remaining sectors, full-time retention rates were higher in fall 2014 than they were in fall 2004 or data are not sufficient to compute a sector retention rate for fall 2014.

Figure 2.1.1

**Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates
of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector
Fall 2014 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, IPEDS fall 2004 and 2014 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 2014 because only three of the schools in this sector reported full-time retention rates for fall 2014 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 increased 1.7 percentage points, from 70.6% in fall 2004 to 72.3% in fall 2014, while the rate for all institutions in Nebraska, excluding the degree-granting, for-profit schools, increased 1.1 percentage points, from 72.1% in fall 2004 to 73.2% in fall 2014.
- 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 2014.

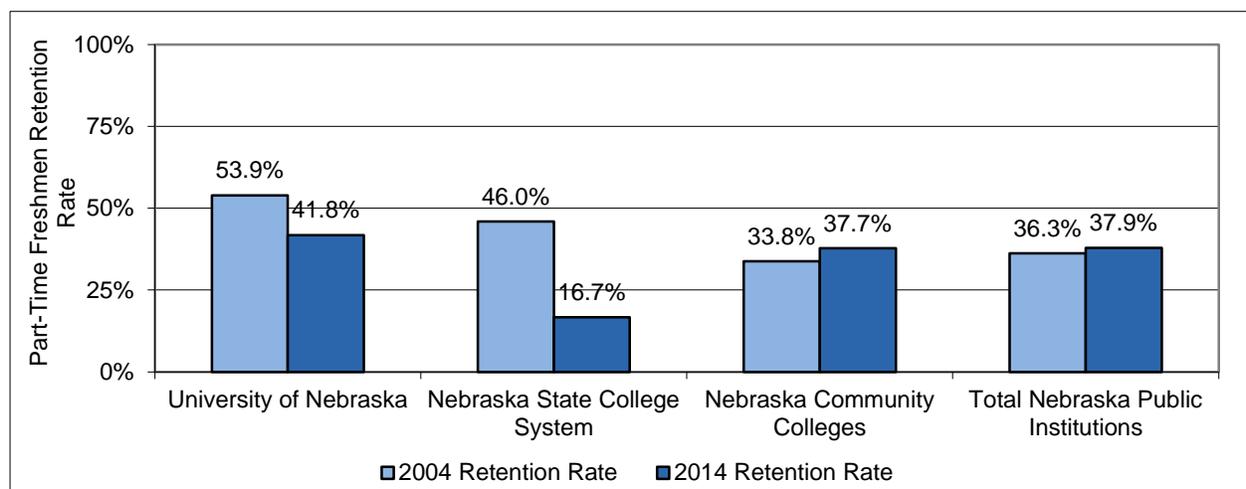
Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates by Sector and Institution

[Figure 2.1.2](#) shows that the part-time freshmen retention rate for the Nebraska State College System was much lower in fall 2014 than in fall 2004. The University of Nebraska’s fall 2014 part-time retention rate was also noticeably lower than in fall 2004. Nebraska’s community colleges’ part-time retention rate was slightly higher in fall 2014 than in fall 2004.³²

- 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 1.6 percentage points, from 36.3% in fall 2004 to 37.9% in fall 2014.

Figure 2.1.2

Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector Fall 2014 Compared to Fall 2004 Baseline



Note. The schools in the independent and for-profit sectors did not provide sufficient data to calculate part-time

³² The Nebraska State College System and the University of Nebraska reported small numbers of part-time first-time freshmen in fall 2003 and fall 2013 compared to Nebraska’s community colleges. Fall 2003: NSCS = 62; NU = 174; CCs = 1,505. Fall 2013: NSCS = 12; NU = 134; CCs = 1,669.

retention rates for these sectors or for the state. See [Table A9.2](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data. Data source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2004 and 2014 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 2014 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.)

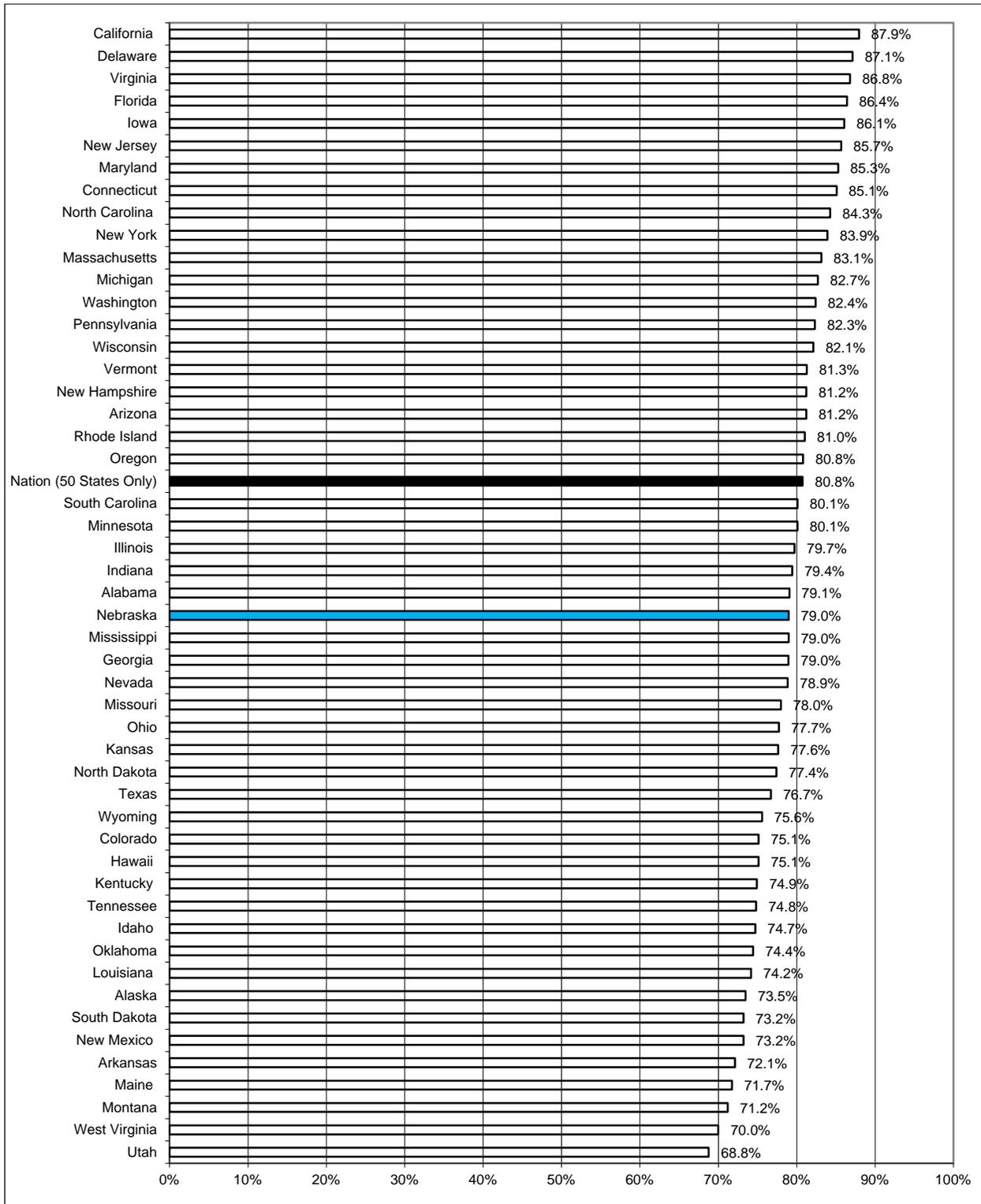
Retention Rates for Public Four-Year Institutions

[Figure 2.1.3](#) and [Figure 2.1.4](#) reveal that the 2014 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 79.0% in fall 2014, compared to a 80.8% 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 0.4 percentage point while the corresponding national rate increased 3.1 percentage points (see [Figure 2.1.5](#)).
- Nebraska's 2014 full-time retention rate for public four-year institutions was the 26th 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 39.7% in fall 2014, compared to the national average of 52.5%.
- Since 2005, Nebraska's part-time retention rate for public four-year institutions has decreased 12.2 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 3.9 percentage points (see [Figure 2.1.6](#)).
- Nebraska's 2014 part-time retention rate for public four-year institutions was the 44th highest in the nation.

Figure 2.1.3

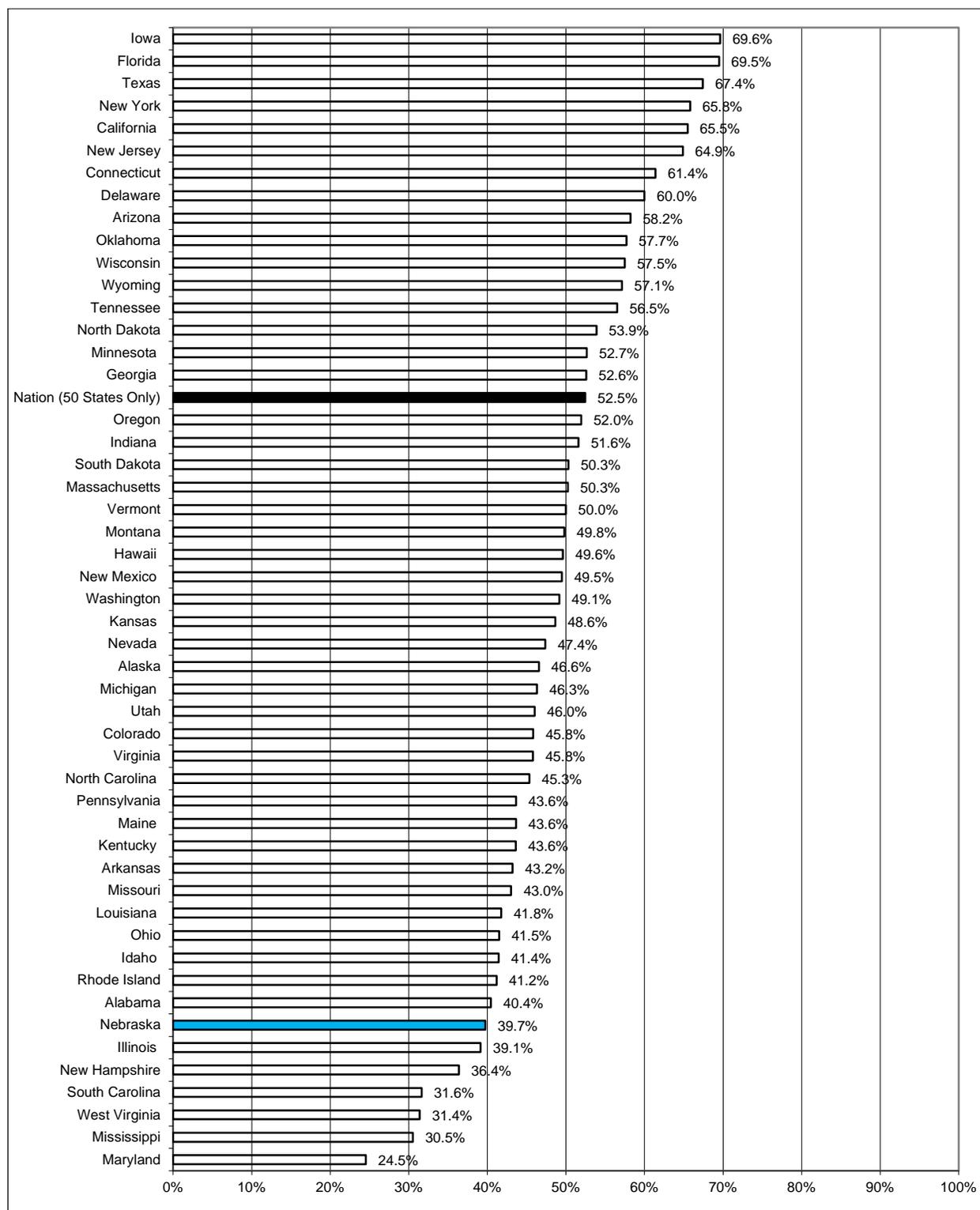
2014 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.4

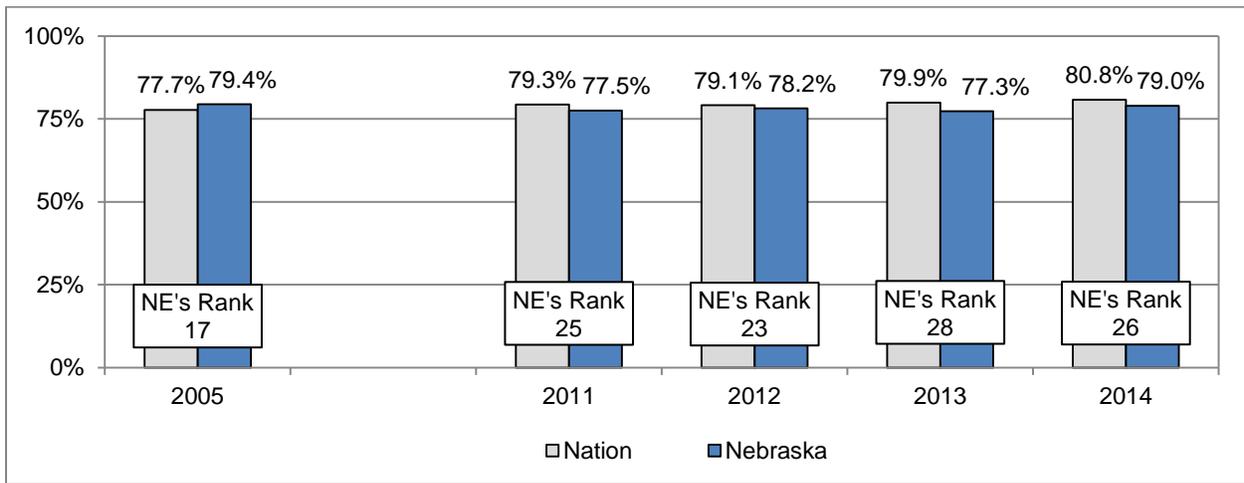
2014 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.5

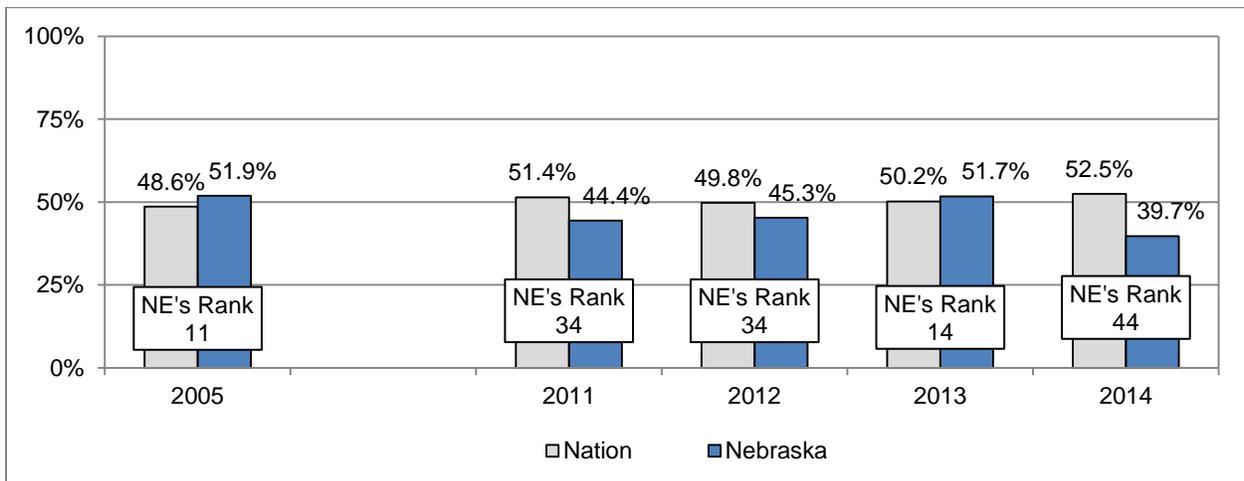
Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions for Nebraska and the United States 2011 Through 2014 Compared to 2005



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.6

Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions for Nebraska and the United States 2011 Through 2014 Compared to 2005



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).

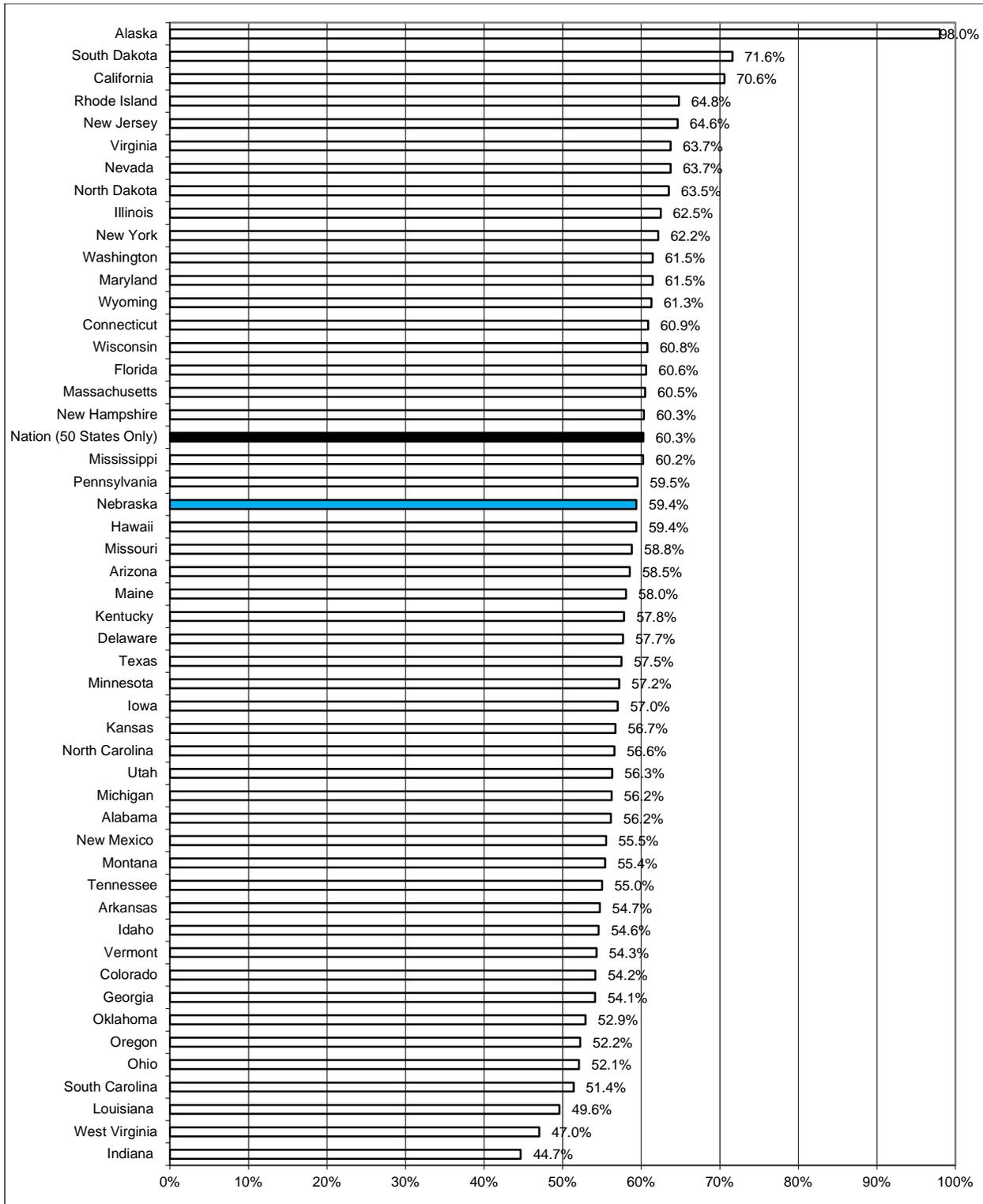
Retention Rates for Public Two-Year Institutions

Figure 2.1.7 through Figure 2.1.10 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 59.4% in fall 2014, compared to a 60.3% retention rate for the nation.
- Since 2005, Nebraska's full-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges has decreased 2.1 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 2.0 percentage points (see Figure 2.1.9).
- Nebraska's 2014 full-time retention rate for the community colleges was the 21st highest in the nation.
- As shown in Figure 2.1.8, the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska's community colleges was 37.7% in fall 2014, compared to the national average of 43.3%.
- Since 2005, Nebraska's part-time retention rate for public two-year institutions has decreased 1.3 percentage points while the corresponding national rate increased 2.7 percentage points (see Figure 2.1.10).
- Nebraska's 2014 part-time retention rate for the community colleges was the 37th highest in the nation.

Figure 2.1.7

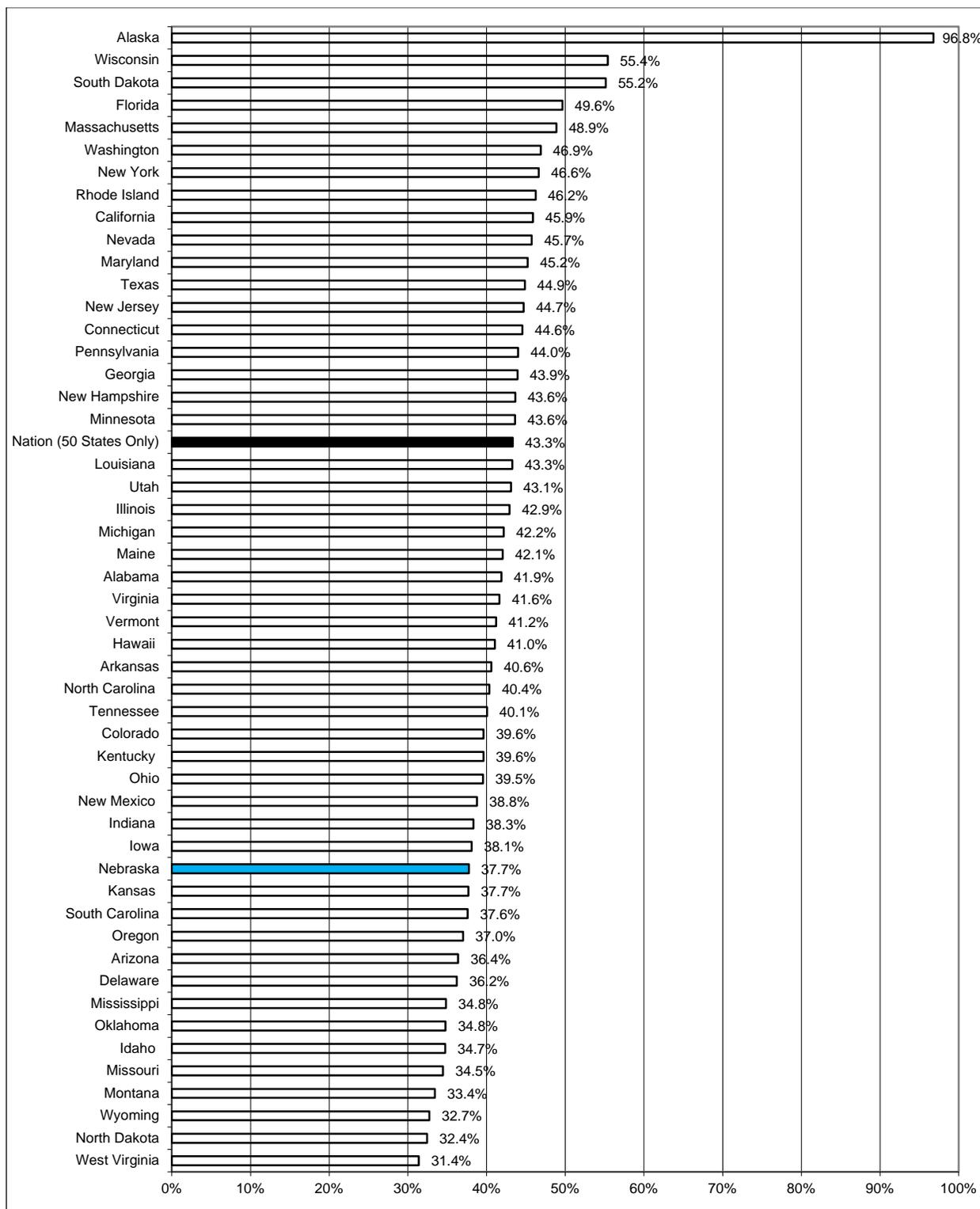
**2014 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)**



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.8

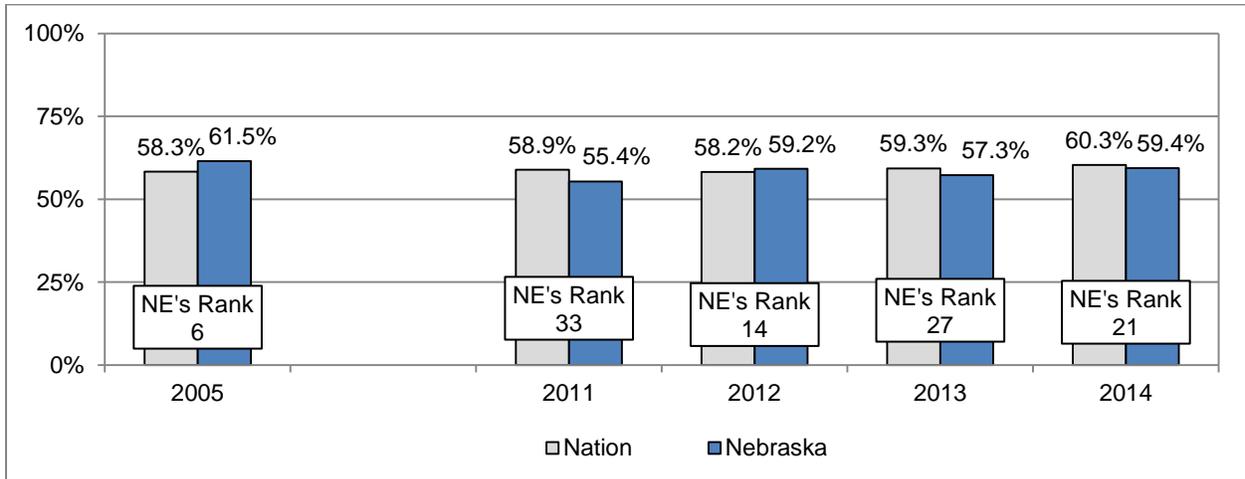
**2014 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)**



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).

Figure 2.1.9

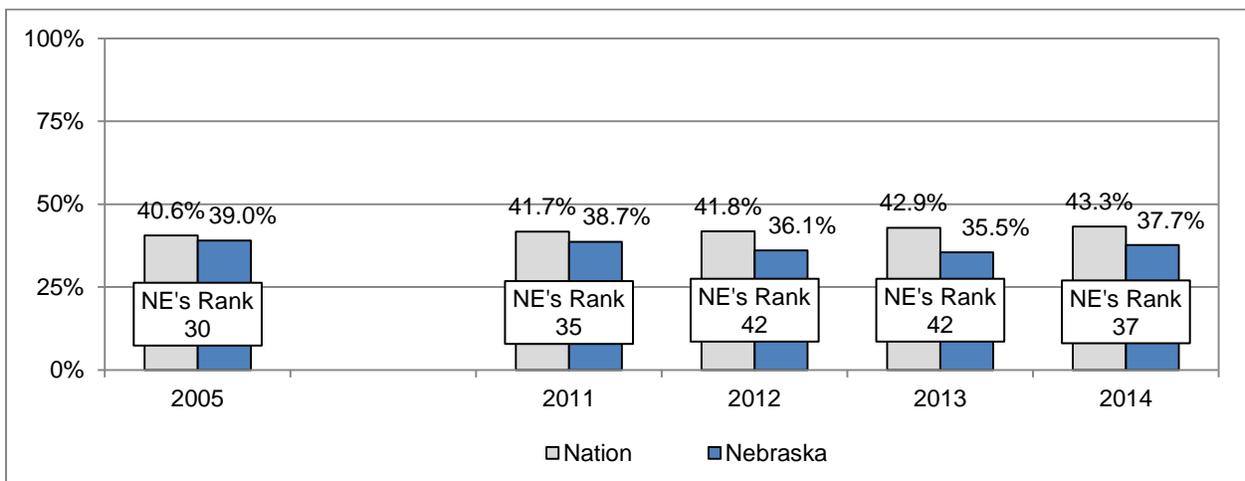
**Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions
for Nebraska and the United States
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)
2011 Through 2014 Compared to 2005**



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (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)
2011 Through 2014 Compared to 2005**



Data source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2014 survey. Commission analysis of data downloaded using the IPEDS cutting tool, January 29, 2016 (before imputation).