

What are college retention rates?

The college retention rate is the percentage of full-time students who return after their freshman year. The retention rate is not the same thing as the [graduation rate](#). There may actually be significant differences between the two numbers.

The [retention rate](#) will always be higher than the graduation rate which is why prospective college applicants will often hear about it. However, colleges with similar retention rates may have dramatically different graduation rates.

According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), there are 69 colleges and universities with 500 or more undergraduates that have a retention rate of 95% or better. The four-year graduation rate for the schools in this group range from 41% to 93%. Only eight institutions in this group have a four-year graduation rate of 90% or better. That's one fewer than the nine schools that had graduation rates less than 70%. A total of 19 had four-year graduate rates of less than 80%

There are 106 schools with a retention rate between 90% and 94%. Their four-year graduation rates vary from a low of 11% to a high of 90%. Only ten had four-year graduation rates of 85% or higher while 28 had graduation rates less than 60%.

Ultimately, college retention rates are not an adequate substitution for graduation rates. Nor are they useful in comparing institutions.

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