

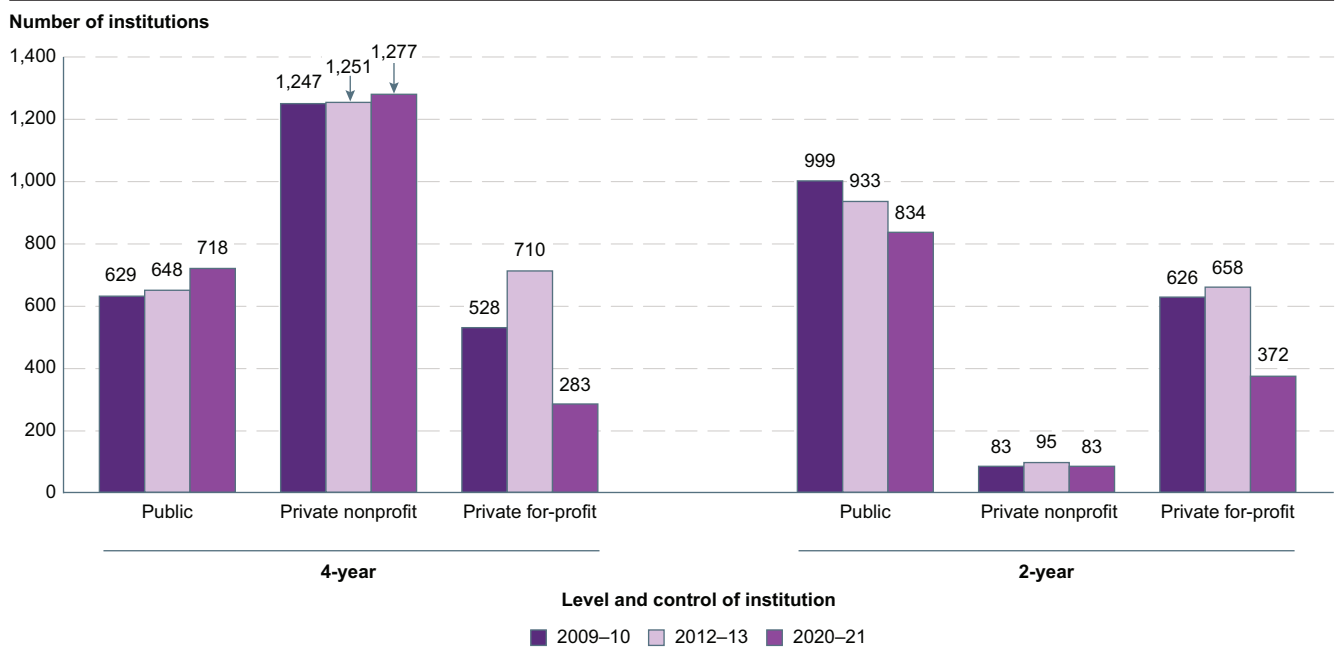
# Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

*In academic year 2020–21, some 25 percent of 4-year institutions had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants), 37 percent accepted three-quarters or more of their applicants, 27 percent accepted from one-half to less than three-quarters of their applicants, and 12 percent accepted less than one-half of their applicants.*

In academic year 2020-21, there were approximately 3,567 degree-granting institutions in the United States<sup>1</sup> with first-year undergraduates. Of these institutions, 2,278 were 4-year institutions offering programs at the bachelor's or higher degree level and 1,289 were 2-year institutions offering associate's degrees and other certificates. Some of the differences in the characteristics of 4-year and 2-year institutions may be related to their differing institutional missions. Four-year institutions tend to have a broad range of instructional programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Some 4-year institutions have a strong research focus. The

instructional missions of 2-year institutions generally focus on providing a range of career-oriented programs at the certificate and associate's degree levels and preparing students to transfer to 4-year institutions. Degree-granting institutions may be governed by publicly appointed or elected officials, with major support from public funds (public control), or by privately elected or appointed officials, with major support from private sources (private control). Private institutions may be operated on a nonprofit or for-profit basis. All institutions in this indicator enroll first-year undergraduates in degree-granting programs unless otherwise noted.

**Figure 1. Number of degree-granting postsecondary institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Academic years 2009–10, 2012–13, and 2020–21**

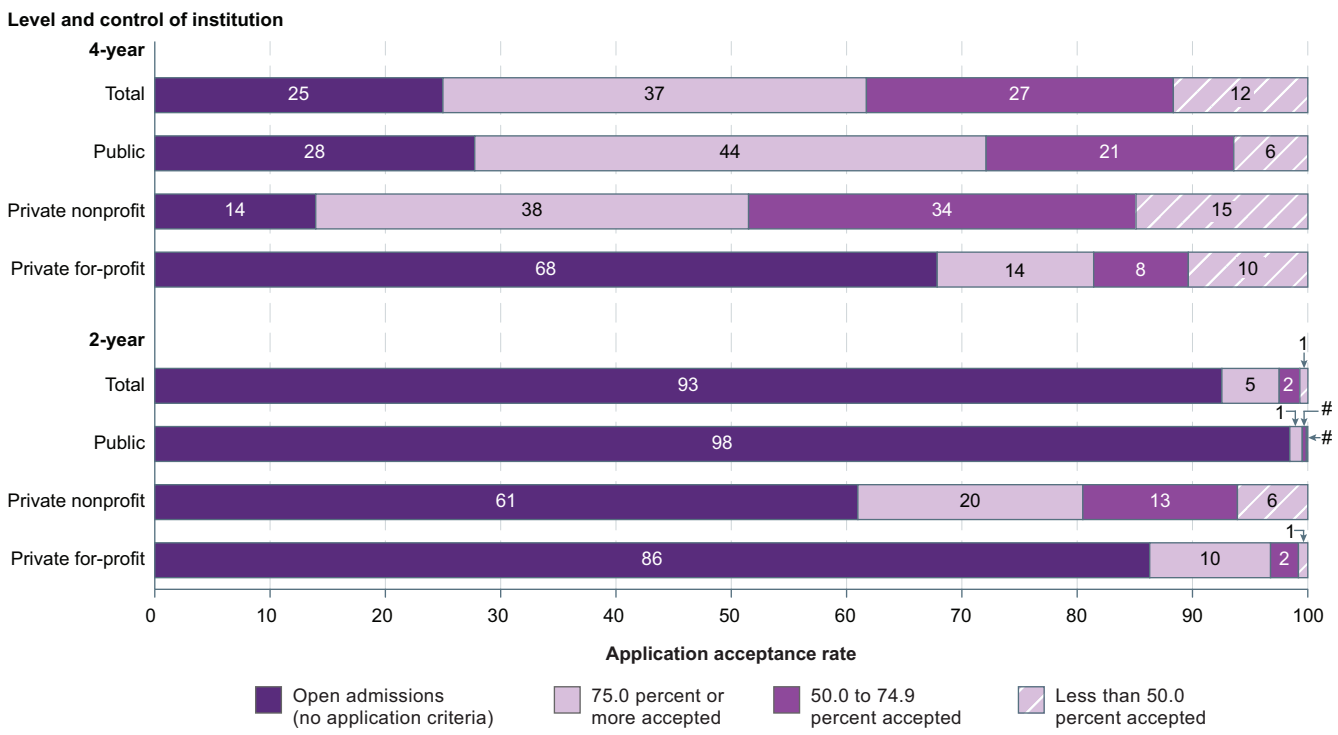


NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions not enrolling any first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2009 and 2012, Institutional Characteristics component; and Winter 2020–21, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*, table 342; *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 305.30.

In academic year 2020-21, the number of public 4-year institutions (718) was 14 percent higher than in 2009-10 (629), and the number of private nonprofit 4-year institutions (1,277) was 2 percent higher than in 2009-10 (1,247). The number of private for-profit 4-year institutions increased 34 percent from 528 in 2009-10 to 710 in 2012-13 and then declined by 60 percent to 283 in 2020-21. Overall, the number of private for-profit 4-year institutions was 46 percent lower in 2020-21 than in 2009-10.

The number of public 2-year institutions declined by 17 percent from 999 in 2009-10 to 834 institutions in 2020-21. There were 83 private nonprofit 2-year institutions in both 2009-10 and 2020-21, with the number fluctuating in between. The number of private for-profit 2-year institutions declined by 41 percent during this period, from 626 to 372.

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of application acceptance rates at degree-granting postsecondary institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Fall 2020**



# Rounds to zero.  
NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions not enrolling any first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2020–21, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 305.40.

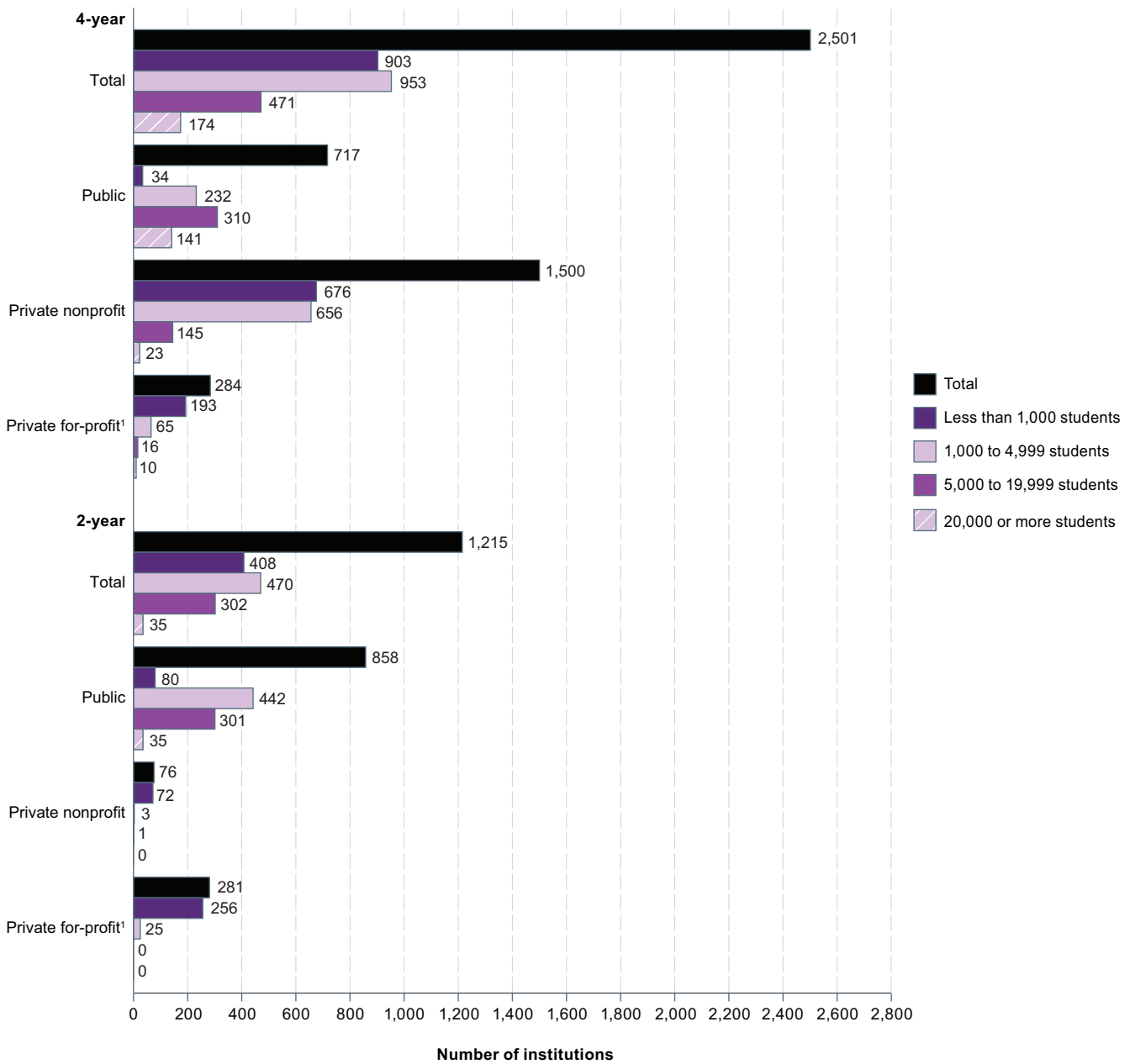
Admissions policies varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions at both the 4-year and the 2-year levels in fall 2020. For example, the percentage of 4-year institutions that had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants) was 68 percent at private for-profit institutions, 28 percent at public institutions, and 14 percent at private nonprofit institutions. During fall 2020, a lower percentage of public 4-year institutions (6 percent) accepted less than one-half of their applicants than did private for-profit (10 percent) and private nonprofit (15 percent) 4-year institutions. In comparison, prior to the coronavirus pandemic, a lower percentage of private for-profit institutions (7 percent)

accepted less than one-half of their applicants than did public (9 percent) and private nonprofit (18 percent) institutions in fall 2019.

Most 2-year institutions (93 percent) had open admissions policies in 2020-21. Some 98 percent of public 2-year institutions, 86 percent of private for-profit 2-year institutions, and 61 percent of private nonprofit 2-year institutions had open admissions policies. Six percent of private nonprofit 2-year institutions accepted less than one-half of their applicants, compared with 1 percent of private for-profit 2-year institutions and less than 1 percent of public 2-year institutions.

Figure 3. Number of degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and enrollment size: Fall 2020

Level and control of institution



<sup>1</sup> Private for-profit institutions are categorized as 2-year or 4-year based on the level of institution as defined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, which may occasionally differ from the Carnegie classification's definition of 2-year institutions.

NOTE: Data in this table represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions with no enrollment reported separately from the enrollment of an associated main campus.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2021, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 317.40.

In fall 2020, the 3,716 degree-granting institutions that enrolled both undergraduate and graduate students—including those institutions that did not enroll first-time undergraduate students—varied in enrollment size, from institutions enrolling fewer than 200 students to those enrolling more than 20,000 students. Despite the sizable number of small degree-granting colleges and universities, most students attended larger colleges and universities. Some 35 percent of institutions (1,311 institutions) had an enrollment size of fewer than 1,000 students; these institutions enrolled 3 percent of all students. Conversely, institutions with 20,000 or more students made up 6 percent of institutions (209 institutions) yet enrolled 39 percent of all students. Midsized institutions that enrolled between 1,000 and 4,999 students made up 38 percent of all institutions (1,423 institutions) and enrolled 19 percent of all students. Institutions that enrolled between 5,000 and 19,999 students made up 21 percent of all institutions (773 institutions) and enrolled 40 percent of all students.

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are degree-granting institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission is educating Black Americans. In fall 2020, there were 101 degree-granting 4-year and 2-year

HBCUs in operation<sup>2</sup>—52 were public institutions and 49 were private nonprofit institutions.

In fall 2020, the U.S. Department of Education categorized 451 institutions<sup>3</sup> as eligible Hispanic-serving institutions. These institutions are eligible to apply for a number of grant programs through the Hispanic-Serving Institutions Division in the Department’s Office of Postsecondary Education. Eligible institutions meet various program criteria and have at least 25 percent Hispanic student enrollment.<sup>4</sup> Sixty-eight percent of the 451 Hispanic-serving institutions in operation in 2020–21 were public institutions.

Thirty-five tribal colleges were members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium in fall 2020. With few exceptions, tribal colleges are tribally controlled and located on reservations. Eighty-six percent of the 35 institutions in operation in 2020–21 were public institutions.

Other institutions serving specific populations in fall 2020 included 35 colleges and universities identified by the Women’s College Coalition as women’s colleges.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> This count includes one institution in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

<sup>3</sup> This count includes 56 institutions in Puerto Rico.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on Hispanic-Serving Institutions, please see <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idades/hsidivision.html>

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 305.30, 305.40, 312.30, 312.40, 312.50, 313.10, and 317.40; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 305.40; *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*, table 342

**Related indicators and resources:** [Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty](#); [Characteristics of Postsecondary Students](#); [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#); [Postsecondary Institution Expenses](#); [Postsecondary Institution Revenues](#); [Spotlight B: Characteristics of Postsecondary Institutions Serving Specific Minority Racial/Ethnic Groups](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]; [Undergraduate Enrollment](#)

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**Glossary:** Associate’s degree; Bachelor’s degree; Control of institutions; Degree-granting institutions; Doctor’s degree; Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs); Master’s degree; Postsecondary education; Postsecondary institutions (basic classification by level); Private institution; Public school or institution; Tribal colleges and universities; Undergraduate students; Women’s colleges