

Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

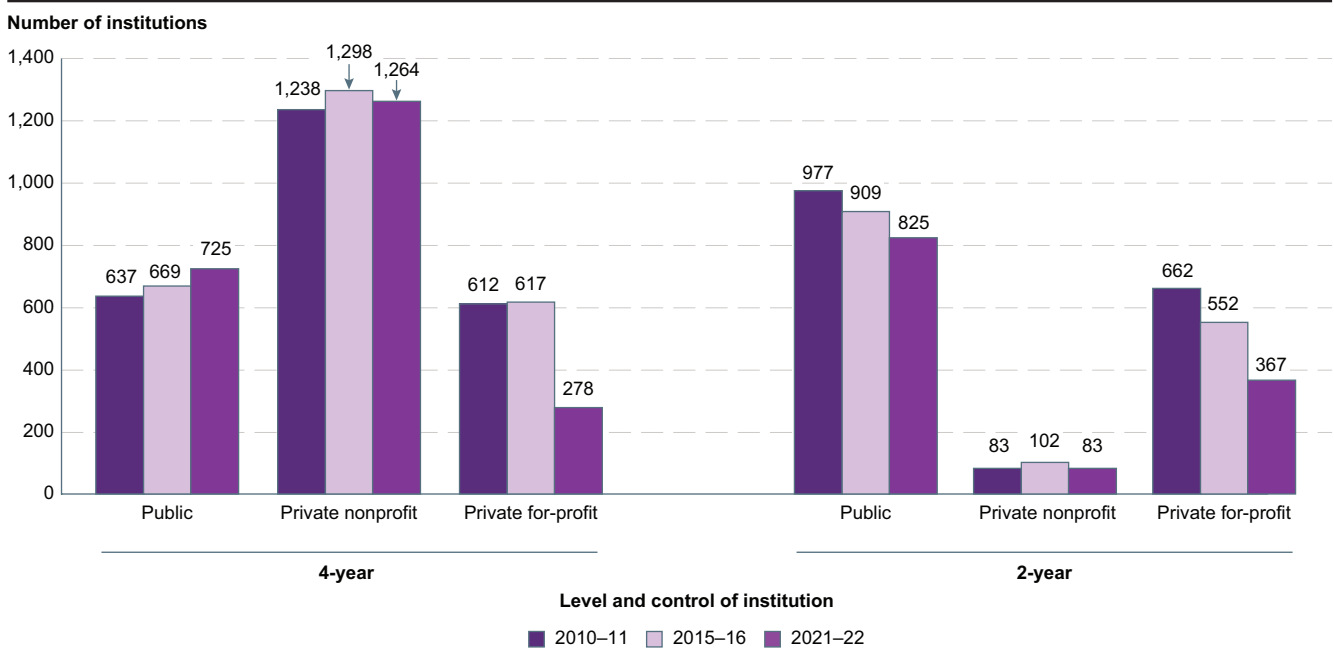
In academic year 2021–22, some 25 percent of 4-year institutions had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants), 42 percent accepted three-quarters or more of their applicants, 23 percent accepted from one-half to less than three-quarters of their applicants, and 10 percent accepted less than one-half of their applicants.

In academic year 2021–22, there were 3,542 degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States¹ with first-year undergraduates. Of these institutions, 2,267 were 4-year institutions offering at least one program at the bachelor’s or higher degree level and 1,275 were 2-year institutions offering associate’s degrees and certificates. This indicator presents data on the number of 2- and 4-year institutions by institutional control (public, private nonprofit, private for-profit), admissions policies, enrollment size, and specific populations served. 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.

Number of Institutions

Figure 1. Number of degree-granting postsecondary institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Academic years 2010–11, 2015–16, and 2021–22



NOTE: Data in this figure 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 2010 and 2015, Institutional Characteristics component; and Winter 2021–22, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 305.30.

Between academic years 2010-11 and 2021-22, changes in the number of 4-year institutions varied by control of institution.

By institutional control, the number of 4-year institutions in 2021-22 compared to the number in 2010-11 was

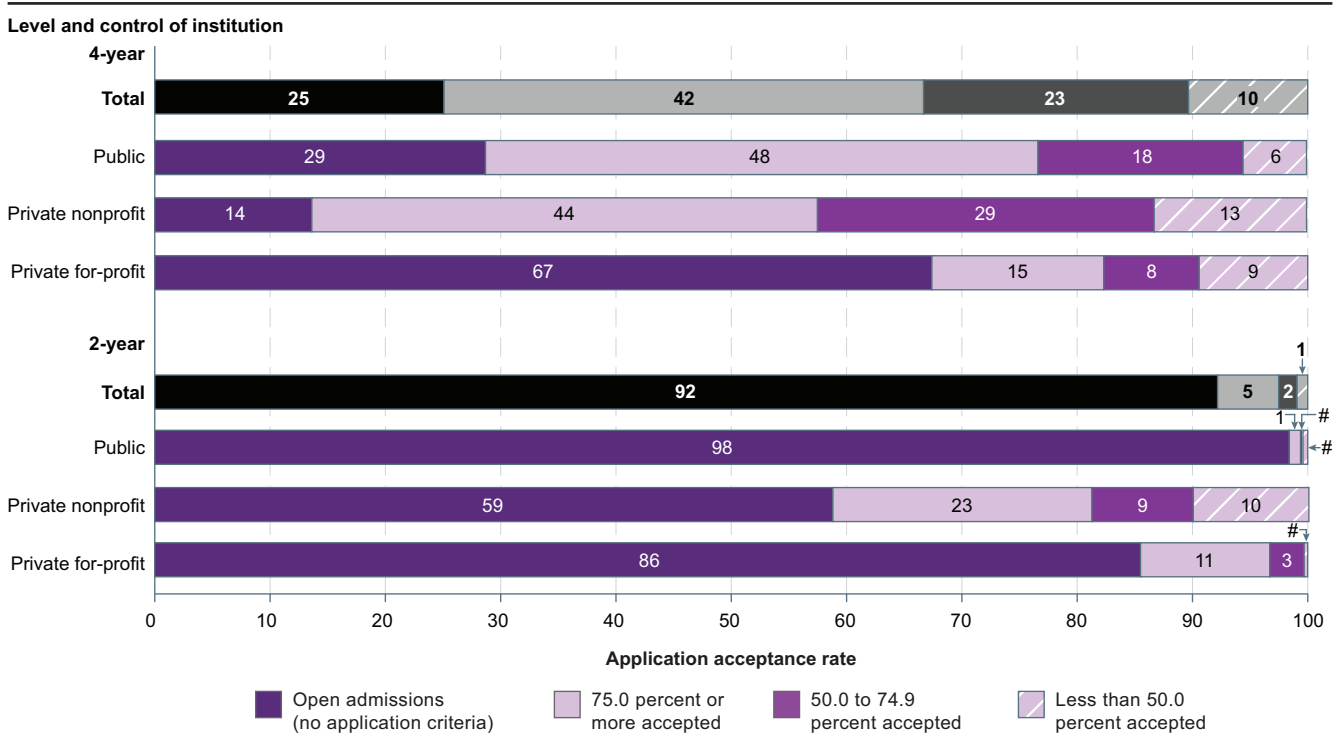
- 14 percent higher for public institutions (725 vs. 637 institutions), with the number increasing throughout this period;
- 2 percent higher for private nonprofit institutions (1,264 vs. 1,238 institutions), although there was no consistent trend in the number of institutions throughout this period; and
- 55 percent lower for private for-profit institutions (278 vs. 612 institutions), with the number declining after a peak in 2012-13 (710 institutions).

Overall, the number of 2-year institutions decreased between academic years 2010-11 and 2021-22. By institutional control, the number of 2-year institutions in 2021-22 compared to the number in 2010-11 was

- 16 percent lower for public institutions (825 vs. 977 institutions), with the number decreasing throughout this period;
- the same for private nonprofit institutions (83 institutions), with the number decreasing after a peak of 102 institutions in 2015-16; and
- 45 percent lower for private for-profit institutions, (367 vs. 662 institutions), with the number decreasing throughout this period.

Admissions Policies

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of degree-granting postsecondary institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution and application acceptance rates: Fall 2021



Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Data in this figure 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. The total on this figure differs slightly from other counts of institutions with first-year undergraduates because approximately 1.0 percent of these institutions did not report application information. 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 2021-22, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 305.40.

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Admissions policies varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions at both the 4-year and the 2-year levels in fall 2021. For example, the percentage of 4-year institutions that had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants) was

- 29 percent of public institutions;
- 14 percent of private nonprofit institutions; and
- 67 percent of private for-profit institutions.

During fall 2021, a lower percentage of public 4-year institutions (6 percent) accepted less than one-half of their applicants than did private nonprofit (13 percent) and private for-profit (9 percent) 4-year institutions. In comparison, prior to the coronavirus pandemic, a lower percentage of private for-profit institutions (7 percent)

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

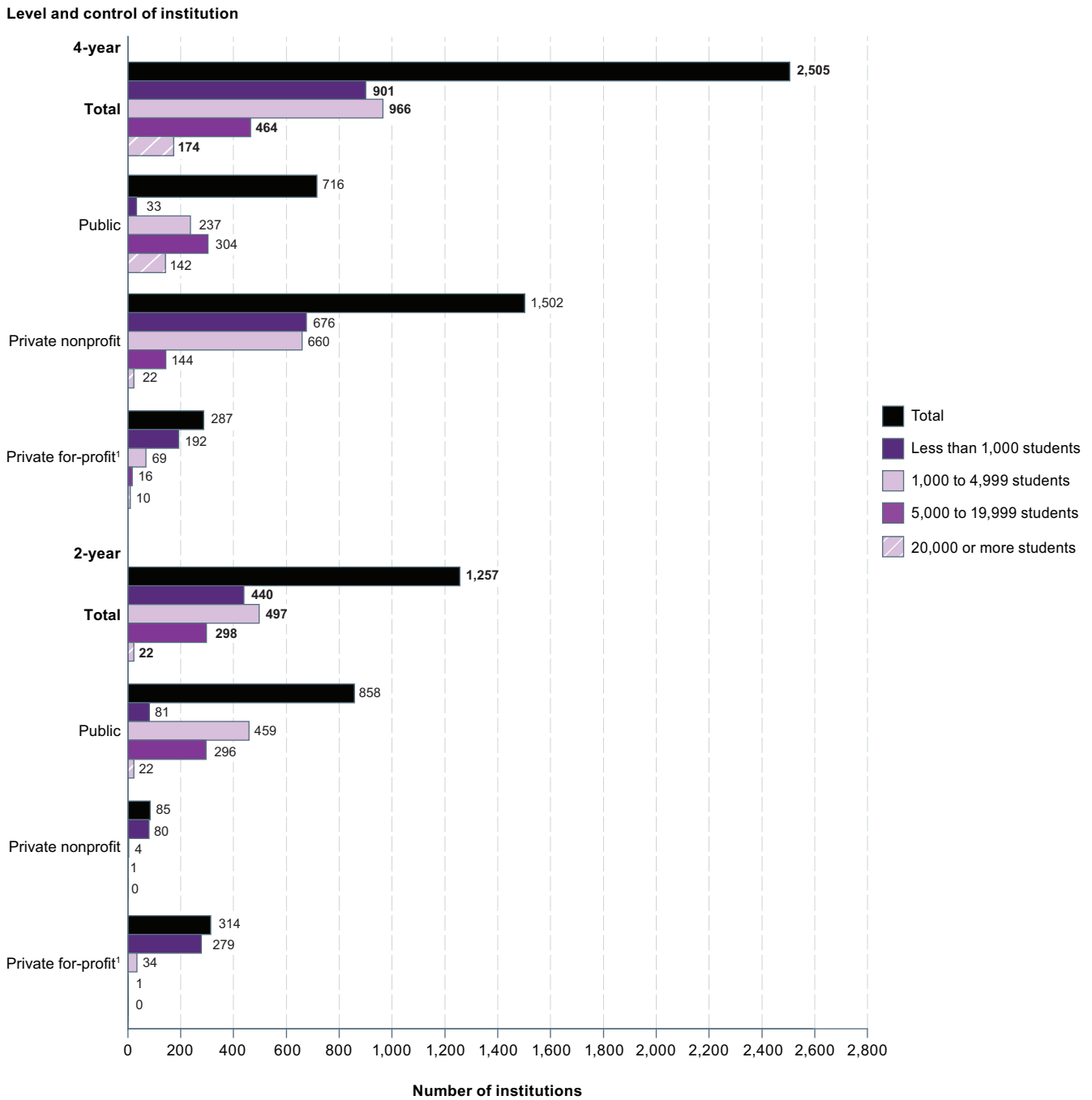
Most 2-year institutions (92 percent) had open admissions policies in fall 2021, including

- 98 percent of public institutions;
- 59 percent of private nonprofit institutions; and
- 86 percent of private for-profit institutions.

Ten percent of private nonprofit 2-year institutions accepted less than one-half of their applicants, compared with less than one-half of 1 percent each of public and private for-profit 2-year institutions.

Size of Institution

Figure 3. Number of degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution and enrollment size: Fall 2021



¹ 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 figure 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 2022, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 317.40.

In fall 2021, the 3,762 degree-granting institutions that enrolled undergraduate and/or graduate students—including those institutions that did not enroll first-time undergraduate students—varied in enrollment size, from institutions enrolling under 200 students to those enrolling 20,000 or more students. Despite the sizable number of small degree-granting colleges and universities, the majority of students attended larger colleges and universities. More than a third of students attended the largest 5 percent of institutions. Specifically, in fall 2021,

- institutions with under 1,000 students made up 36 percent of institutions (1,341 institutions) and enrolled 3 percent of all students;
- institutions with between 1,000 and 4,999 students made up 39 percent of all institutions (1,463 institutions) and enrolled 19 percent of all students;
- institutions with between 5,000 and 19,999 students made up 20 percent of all institutions (762 institutions) and enrolled 40 percent of all students; and
- institutions with 20,000 or more students made up 5 percent of institutions (196 institutions) and enrolled 38 percent of all students.

Institutions Serving Specific Populations

Historically Black colleges and universities² (HBCUs) are degree-granting institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission is educating Black Americans. In fall 2021, there were 99 degree-granting 4-year and 2-year HBCUs in operation³—50 were public institutions and 49 were private nonprofit institutions.

In fall 2021, the U.S. Department of Education categorized 516 institutions⁴ as eligible Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs). 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.⁵ Sixty-seven percent of the 516 Hispanic-serving institutions in operation in fall 2021 were public institutions, and 33 percent were private nonprofit institutions.

Thirty-five tribal colleges⁶ were members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium in fall 2021. With few exceptions, tribal colleges are tribally controlled and located on reservations. Eighty-six percent of the 35 institutions in operation in fall 2021 were public institutions, and 14 percent were private nonprofit institutions.

Other institutions serving specific populations in fall 2021 included 32 colleges and universities identified by the Women’s College Coalition⁷ as women’s colleges.

Institutions also serve different proportions of students with disabilities. The term “students with disabilities” refers to undergraduates who are formally registered with the institution as students with disabilities. In fall 2021, some 12 percent of degree-granting postsecondary institutions with first-year undergraduates (431 institutions) had student populations in which students with disabilities accounted for at least 10 percent of all students. Of these 431 institutions, 23 percent were public, 75 percent were private nonprofit, and 2 percent were private for-profit. The majority of institutions (59 percent) had student populations in which students with disabilities accounted for 3 percent or less of all students.

Endnotes:

¹ Includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia, except as noted.

² For more information on Historically Black colleges and universities, please see <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>.

³ This count includes one institution in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

⁴ This count includes 60 institutions in Puerto Rico.

⁵ For more information on Hispanic-serving institutions, please see <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idades/hsidivision.html>.

⁶ For more information about tribal colleges and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, please see <https://sites.ed.gov/whiaiane/tribes-tcus/tribal-colleges-and-universities/>.

⁷ For more information on the Women's College Coalition, please see <https://www.womenscolleges.org/our-members>.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 305.30, 305.40, 312.30, 312.40, 312.50, 312.80, 313.10, and 317.40; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 305.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 305.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30

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](#)

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