

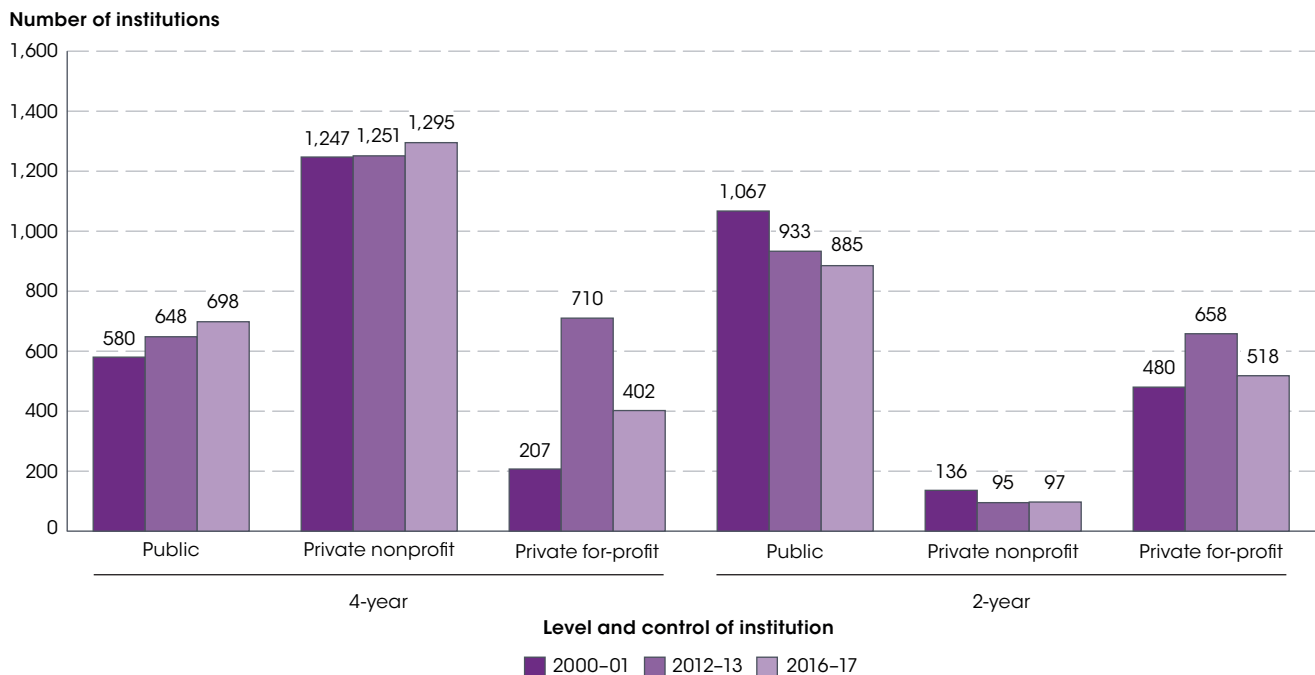
Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

In academic year 2016–17, some 27 percent of 4-year institutions had open admissions policies (accepted all applicants), an additional 27 percent accepted three-quarters or more of their applicants, 32 percent accepted from one-half to less than three-quarters of their applicants, and 14 percent accepted less than one-half of their applicants.

In academic year 2016–17, there were 3,895 degree-granting institutions in the United States with first-year undergraduates: 2,395 were 4-year institutions offering programs at the bachelor’s or higher degree level and 1,500 were 2-year institutions offering associate’s degrees and other certificates. Some of the differences in characteristics of 2-year and 4-year institutions may be related to their differing institutional missions. 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 for transfer to 4-year institutions. 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. 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 analysis enroll first-year undergraduates in degree-granting programs.

Figure 1. Number of degree-granting institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Academic years 2000–01, 2012–13, and 2016–17

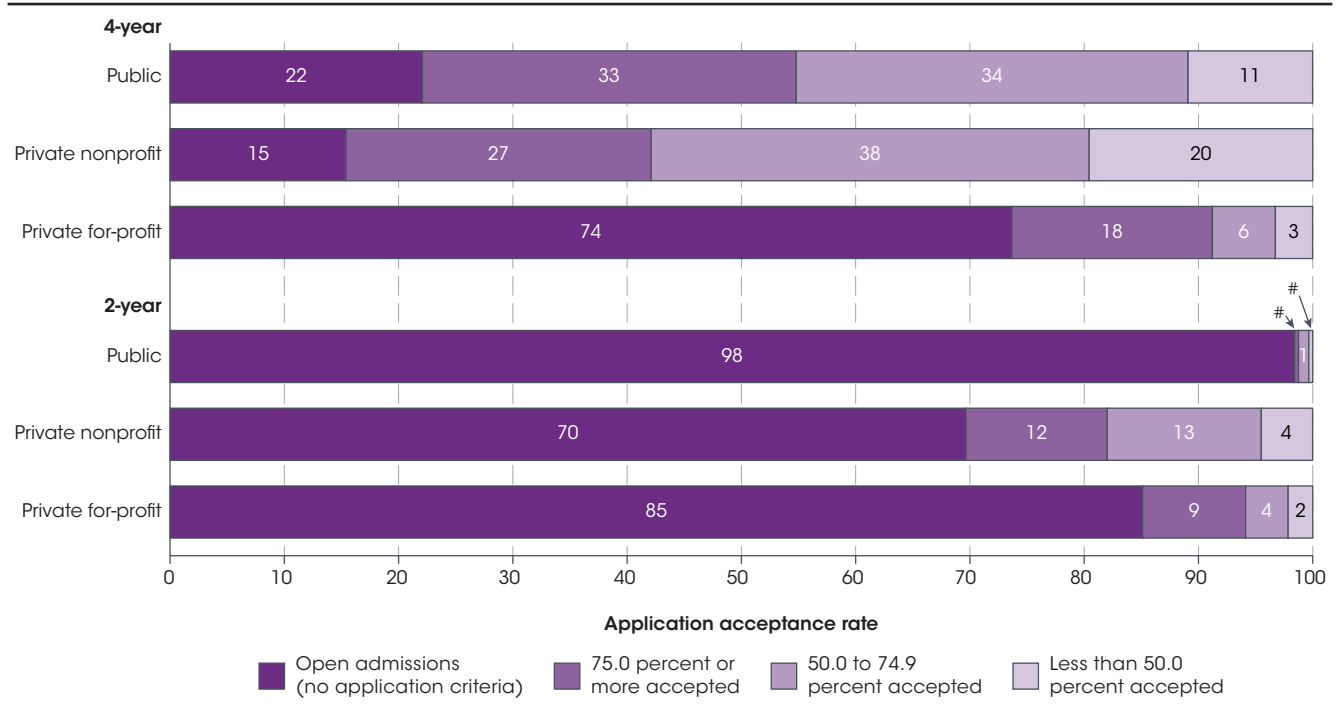


NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions not enrolling any first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2000 and Fall 2012, Institutional Characteristics component; and Winter 2016–17, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 305.30.

In 2016–17, the number of public 4-year institutions (698) was 20 percent higher than in 2000–01 (580), and the number of private nonprofit 4-year institutions (1,295) was 4 percent higher than in 2000–01 (1,247). In contrast, there was fluctuation in the number of private for-profit 4-year institutions. Between 2000–01 and 2012–13, the number of private for-profit 4-year institutions more than tripled, from 207 to 710. After peaking in 2012–13, the number of private for-profit 4-year institutions declined by more than 40 percent to 402 in 2016–17. The number of private for-profit 4-year institutions in 2016–17 (402) was 94 percent higher than in 2000–01 (207).

The number of public 2-year institutions declined from 1,067 in 2000–01 to 933 in 2012–13 and subsequently to 885 in 2016–17. The number of private nonprofit 2-year institutions decreased from 136 in 2000–01 to 95 in 2012–13 and then fluctuated to 97 in 2016–17. The number of private for-profit 2-year institutions also fluctuated during this period, but not as widely as the number of private for-profit 4-year institutions. Between 2000–01 and 2012–13, the number of private for-profit 2-year institutions increased 37 percent from 480 to 658, and then declined 21 percent to 518 in 2016–17.

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of application acceptance rates at degree-granting institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Academic year 2016–17



Rounds to zero.

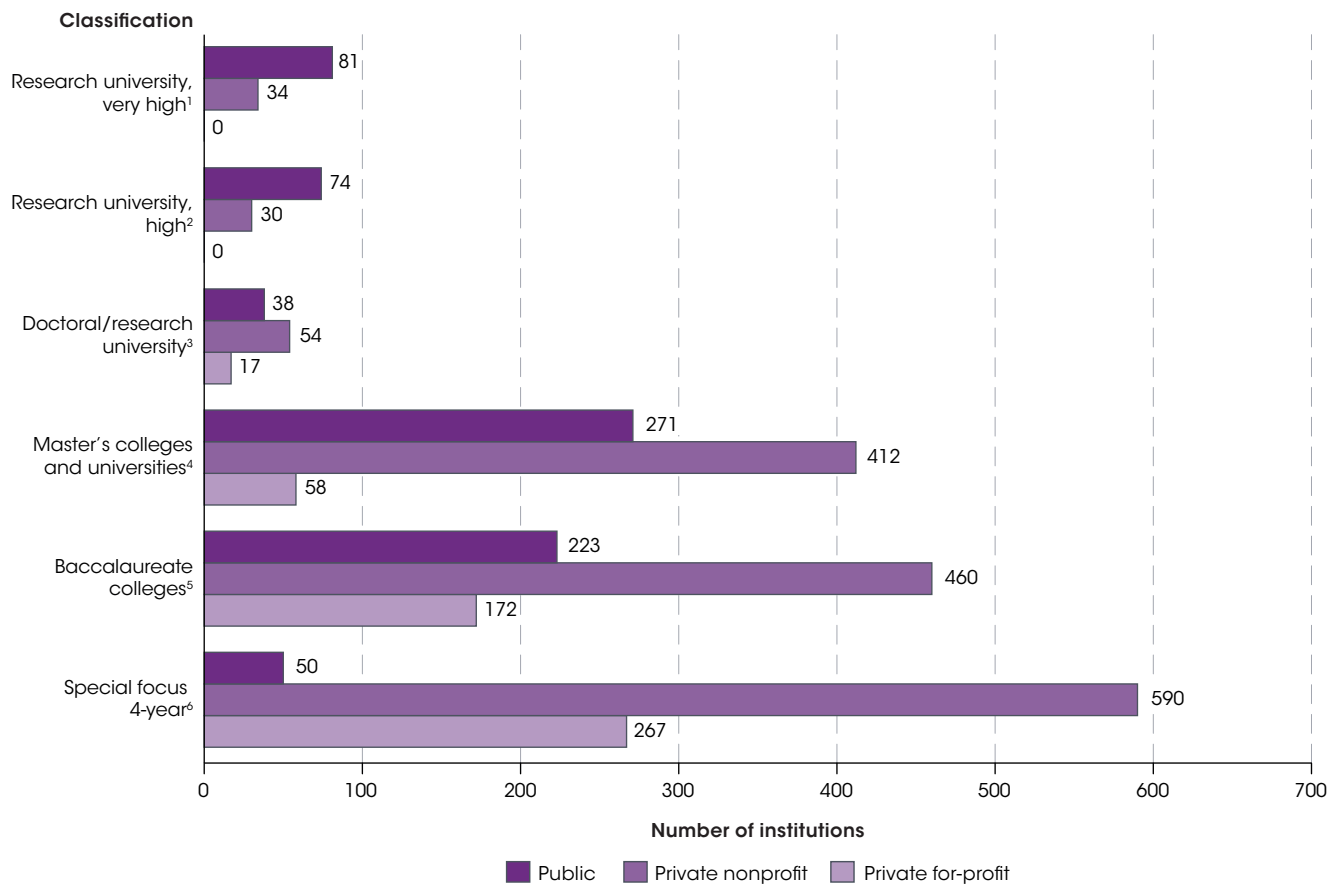
NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions not enrolling any first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates. 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 2016–17, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 305.40.

Admissions policies varied among public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit institutions at both the 2-year and 4-year levels in 2016–17. For example, the percentage of 4-year institutions that had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants) ranged from 74 percent at private for-profit institutions to 22 percent at public institutions and 15 percent at private nonprofit institutions. Accordingly, a lower percentage of private for-profit 4-year institutions (3 percent) accepted less than one-half of their applicants than did private nonprofit (20 percent) and public (11 percent) 4-year institutions.

Most 2-year institutions (92 percent) had open admissions policies in 2016–17. Some 98 percent of public 2-year institutions and 85 percent of private for-profit 2-year institutions had open admissions policies, compared with 70 percent of private nonprofit 2-year institutions. A higher percentage of private nonprofit 2-year institutions were selective than public and private for-profit 2-year institutions. Four percent of private nonprofit 2-year institutions accepted less than one-half of their applicants, compared to less than 1 percent of public 2-year institutions and 2 percent of private for-profit 2-year institutions.

Figure 3. Number of 4-year degree-granting institutions, by classification and control of institution: Fall 2016



¹ Research universities with a very high level of research activity.

² Research universities with a high level of research activity.

³ Institutions that award at least 20 research/scholarship doctor's degrees per year but did not have a high level of research activity.

⁴ Institutions that award at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctor's degrees per year.

⁵ Institutions that primarily emphasize undergraduate education. In addition to institutions that primarily award bachelor's degrees, also includes institutions classified as 4-year in the IPEDS system, but classified as 2-year baccalaureate/associate's colleges in the Carnegie Classification system because they primarily award associate's degrees.

⁶ Institutions that award degrees primarily in single fields of study, such as medicine, business, fine arts, theology, and engineering.

NOTE: Institutions with no enrollment reported separately from the enrollment of an associated main campus are excluded. Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Relative levels of research activity for research universities were determined by an analysis of research and development expenditures, science and engineering research staffing, and doctoral degrees conferred, by field. Further information on the research index ranking may be obtained from <http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2017, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 317.40.

Another way to classify institutions beyond level (2-year vs. 4-year) and control (public vs. private) is by Carnegie Classification, which takes into account such considerations as the types of degrees offered, as well as institutional mission. Institutions that confer 4-year or higher degrees are classified in four broad categories: doctoral and research universities (institutions that award at least 20 research/scholarship doctor's degrees per year); master's colleges and universities (institutions that award at least 50 master's and fewer than 20 doctor's degrees per year); baccalaureate colleges¹ (institutions that have at least one baccalaureate degree program and primarily emphasize undergraduate education); and special focus 4-year institutions (those that award degrees primarily in single fields or related fields of study, such as medicine,

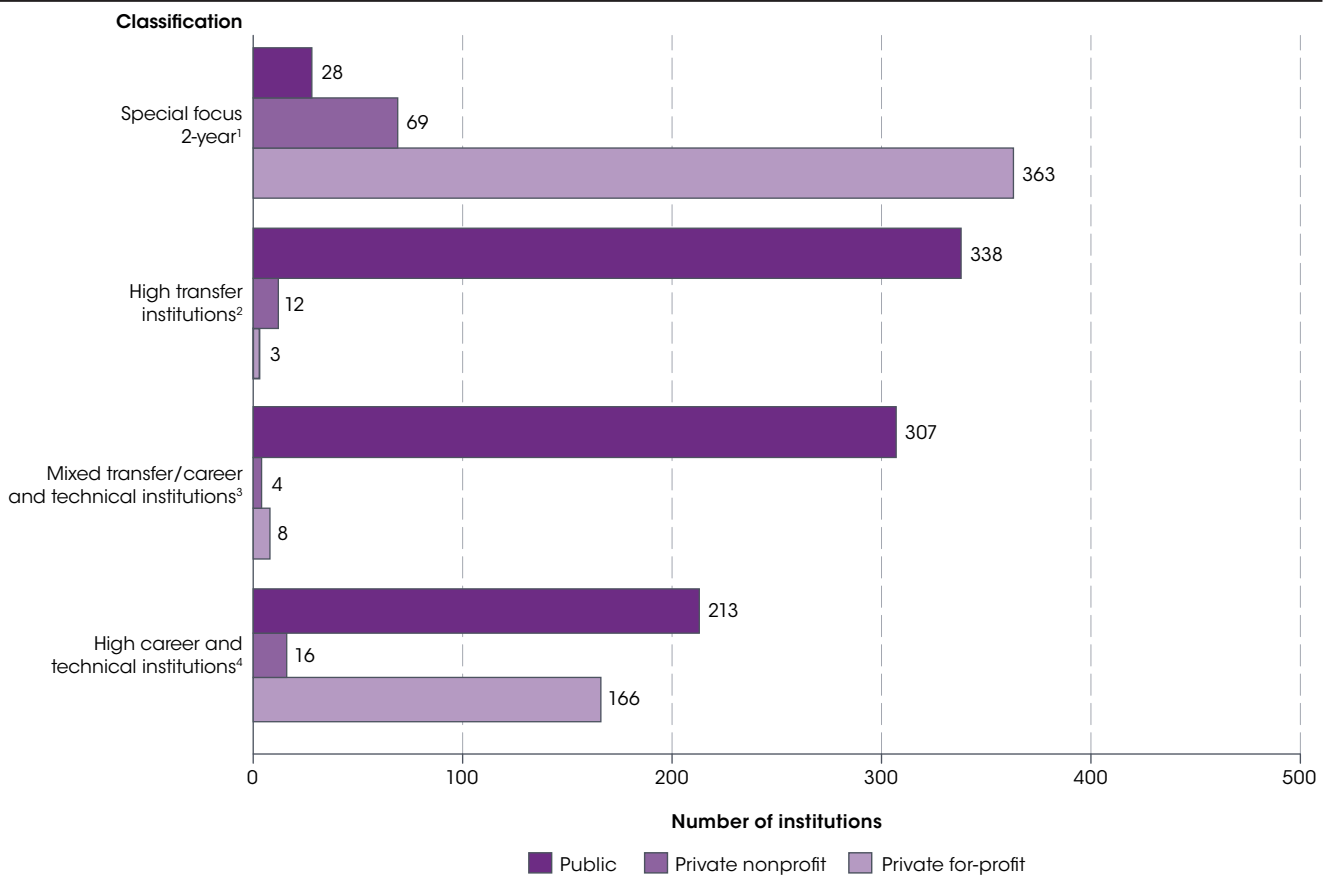
business, fine arts, theology, and engineering, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels).

In 2016–17, there were more than twice as many baccalaureate colleges (855) and master's colleges and universities (741) as doctoral universities (328). Doctoral universities are further classified into one of three categories based on level of research activity. Among the 328 doctoral universities, 219 were classified as research institutions with a very high (115) or high (104) level of research activity. The remaining 109 institutions awarded at least 20 doctor's degrees per year, but did not have a high level of research activity. There were 907 special focus 4-year institutions in 2016–17.

Among public 4-year institutions, there were more doctoral (193), master’s (271), and baccalaureate institutions (223) than special focus institutions (50) in 2016–17. Among private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions, on the other hand, the number of special focus institutions was higher than the number of doctoral,

master’s, and baccalaureate institutions. Among private nonprofit 4-year institutions, there were 590 special focus, 118 doctoral, 412 master’s, and 460 baccalaureate institutions; among private for-profit 4-year institutions, there were 267 special focus, 17 doctoral, 58 master’s, and 172 baccalaureate institutions.

Figure 4. Number of 2-year degree-granting institutions, by classification and control of institution: Fall 2016



¹ Institutions that award degrees primarily in single fields of study, such as medicine, business, fine arts, theology, and engineering.

² Institutions that award less than 30 percent of their awards in career and technical programs.

³ Institutions that award 30 to 49 percent of their awards in career and technical programs.

⁴ Institutions that award 50 percent or more of their awards in career and technical programs.

NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2017, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 317.40.

Two-year institutions that conferred associate’s degrees as the highest degree-level offering are further divided into subcategories according to program focus (i.e., high transfer, high career and technical, mixed transfer/career and technical, and special focus 2-year). Most public institutions were categorized as high transfer (338 institutions), mixed transfer/career and technical (307 institutions) or high career and technical institutions (213 institutions). Only 28 public 2-year institutions were classified as special focus institutions. In contrast,

roughly two-thirds of private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions were classified as special focus institutions. Among private nonprofit institutions, there were 69 special focus institutions, 12 high transfer institutions, 4 mixed transfer/career and technical institutions, and 16 high career and technical institutions. Among private for-profit institutions, there were 363 special focus institutions, 3 high transfer institutions, 8 mixed transfer/career and technical institutions, and 166 high career and technical institutions.

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are degree-granting institutions established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans. In 2016–17, there were 102 4-year and 2-year degree-granting HBCUs in operation—51 were public institutions and 51 were private nonprofit institutions. Other institutions serving specific populations in 2016 included 38 colleges and universities identified by the Women’s College Coalition as women’s colleges and 35 tribal colleges, which are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. With few exceptions, tribal colleges are tribally controlled and

located on reservations. About three-quarters of the 35 tribally controlled institutions in operation in 2016–17 were public institutions.

In addition, for fiscal year 2016 the U.S. Department of Education categorized 415 institutions 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.²

Endnotes:

¹ In addition to institutions that primarily award bachelor’s degrees, also includes institutions classified as 4-year in the IPEDS system, but classified as 2-year baccalaureate/associate’s colleges in the Carnegie Classification system because they primarily award associate’s degrees.

² For more information on Hispanic-Serving Institutions, including a list of eligible Hispanic-Serving Institutions for fiscal year 2016, please see <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/idades/hsidivision.html>.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 305.30, 305.40, 312.30, 312.50, 313.10, and 317.40

Related indicators and resources: [Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty](#); [Postbaccalaureate Enrollment](#); [Postsecondary Institution Expenses](#); [Postsecondary Institution Revenues](#); [Undergraduate Enrollment](#)

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