

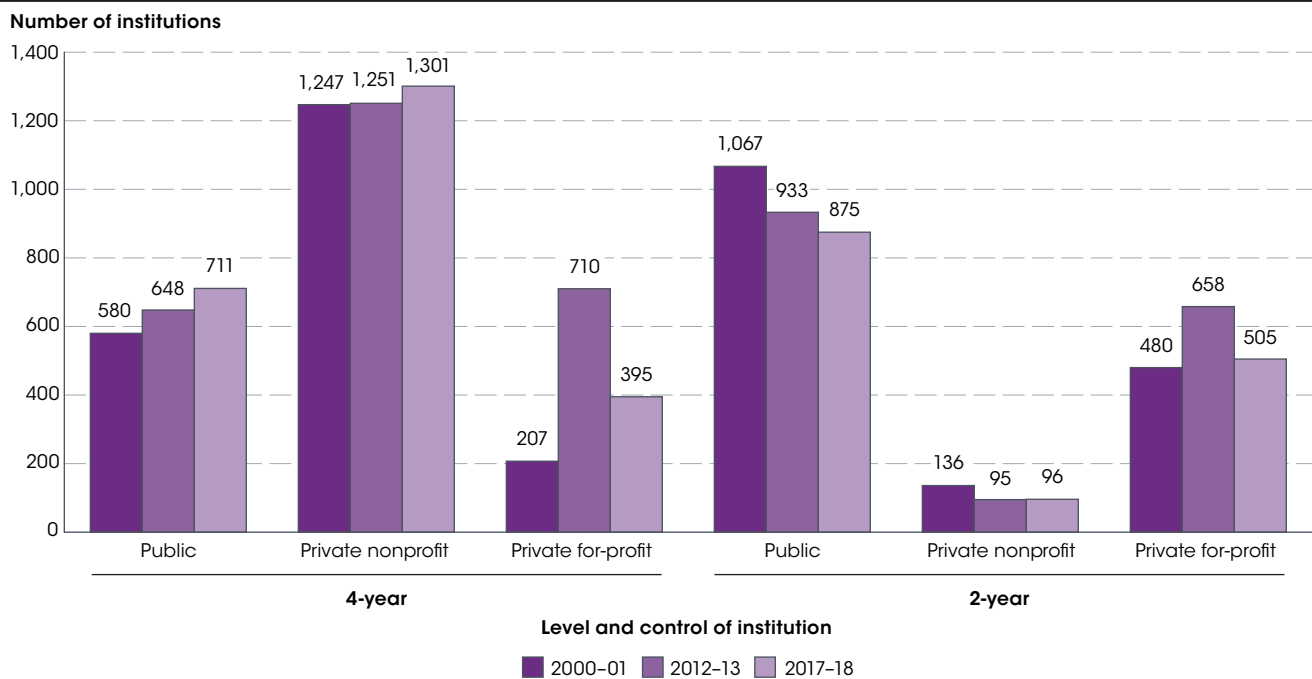
Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions

In academic year 2017–18, some 27 percent of 4-year institutions had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants), 29 percent accepted three-quarters or more of their applicants, 30 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 2017–18, there were 3,883 degree-granting institutions in the United States¹ with first-year undergraduates: 2,407 were 4-year institutions offering programs at the bachelor’s or higher degree level and 1,476 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 analysis enroll first-year undergraduates in degree-granting programs unless otherwise noted.

Figure 1. Number of degree-granting institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Academic years 2000–01, 2012–13, and 2017–18



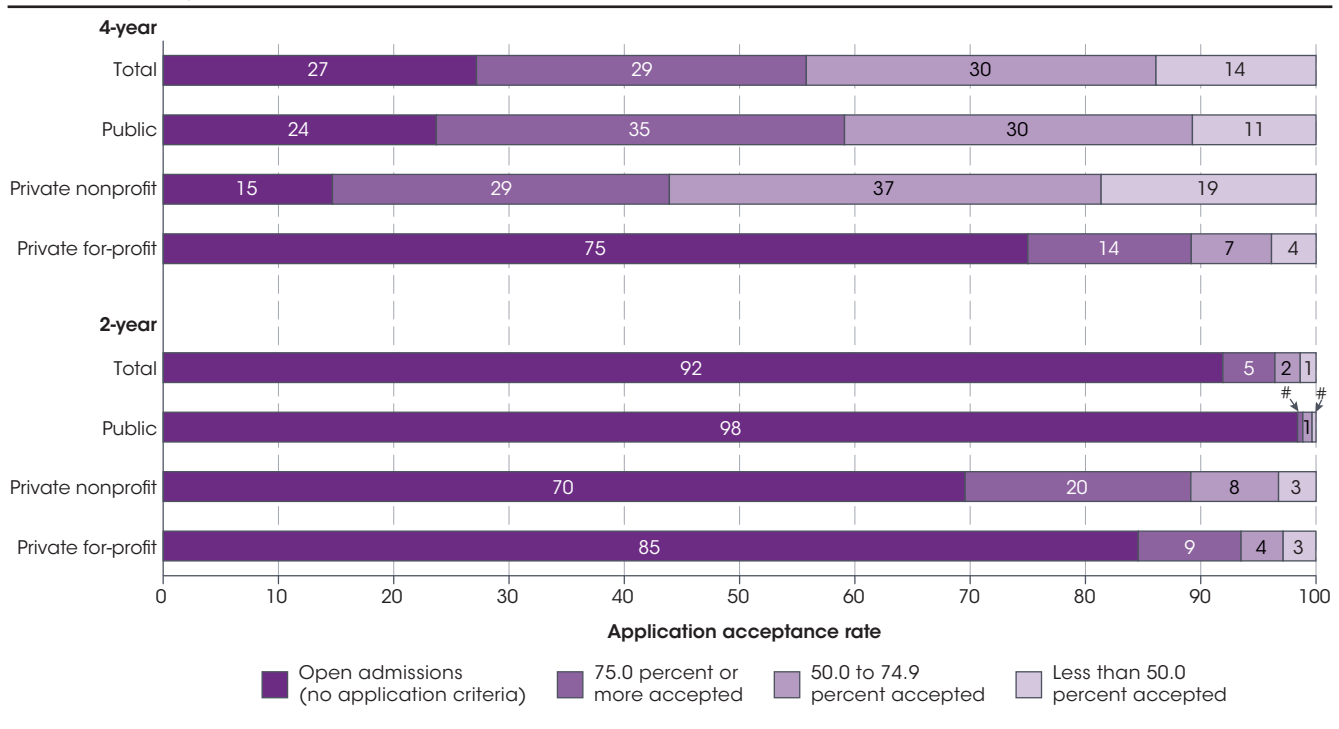
NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate’s or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions not enrolling any first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2000 and Fall 2012, Institutional Characteristics component; and Winter 2017–18, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30; and *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 305.30.

In academic year 2017–18, the number of public 4-year institutions (711) was 23 percent higher than in 2000–01 (580), and the number of private nonprofit 4-year institutions (1,301) was 4 percent higher than in 2000–01 (1,247). In contrast, the number of private for-profit 4-year institutions fluctuated. 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 395 in 2017–18. The number of private for-profit 4-year institutions in 2017–18 (395) was 91 percent higher than in 2000–01 (207).

and subsequently 6 percent to 875 in 2017–18 for a total decline of 18 percent from 2000–01 to 2017–18. The number of private nonprofit 2-year institutions decreased 30 percent from 136 in 2000–01 to 95 in 2012–13 and was 96 in 2017–18. The number of private for-profit 2-year institutions 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 by 37 percent, from 480 to 658, and then it declined by 23 percent to 505 in 2017–18. Overall the number of private for-profit 2-year institutions was 5 percent higher in 2017–18 than in 2000–01.

The number of public 2-year institutions declined 13 percent from 1,067 in 2000–01 to 933 in 2012–13

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of application acceptance rates at degree-granting institutions with first-year undergraduates, by level and control of institution: Academic year 2017–18



Rounds to zero.

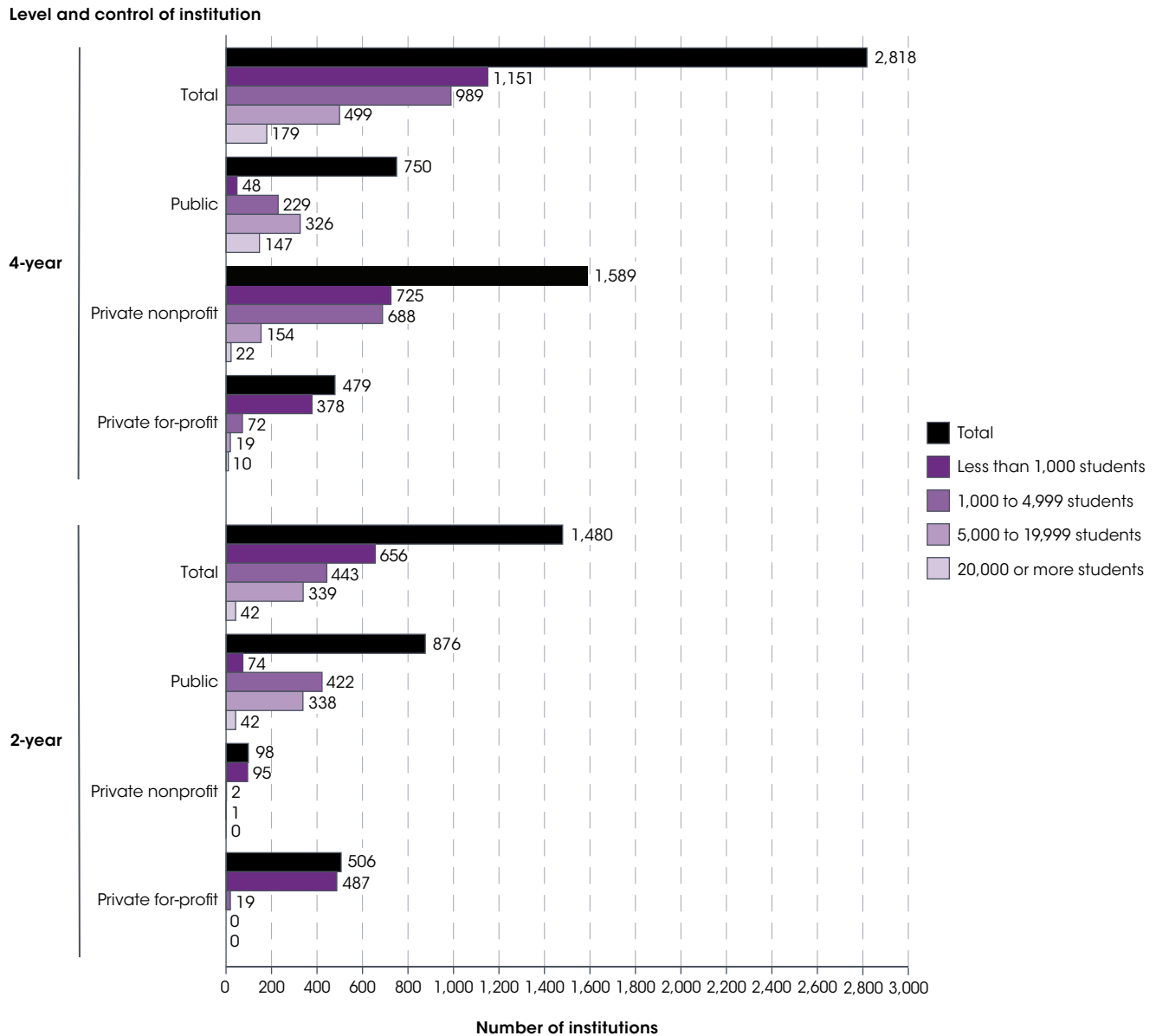
NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Excludes institutions not enrolling any first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. 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 2017–18, Admissions component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 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 academic year 2017–18. For example, the percentage of 4-year institutions that had open admissions policies (i.e., accepted all applicants) ranged from 75 percent at private for-profit institutions to 24 percent at public institutions to 15 percent at private nonprofit institutions. Accordingly, a lower percentage of private for-profit 4-year institutions (4 percent) accepted less than one-half of their applicants than did public (11 percent) and private nonprofit (19 percent) 4-year institutions.

Most 2-year institutions (92 percent) had open admissions policies in 2017–18. 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. Higher percentages of private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions than of public 2-year institutions were selective: 3 percent of private nonprofit and private for-profit 2-year institutions accepted less than one-half of their applicants, compared with less than 1 percent of public 2-year institutions.

Figure 3. Number of degree-granting institutions, by level and control of institution and enrollment size: Fall 2017



NOTE: 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. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2018, Fall Enrollment component. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 317.40.

In academic year 2017–18, the 4,298 degree-granting institutions that enrolled both undergraduate and graduate students varied in enrollment size, from fewer than 200 students to more than 30,000 students. Despite the sizable number of small degree-granting colleges and universities, most students attended larger colleges and universities. Some 42 percent of institutions (1,807 institutions) had an enrollment size of fewer than 1,000 students, yet these institutions enrolled 3 percent

of all students. Conversely, institutions with 20,000 or more students comprised 5 percent of institutions (221 institutions) yet enrolled 37 percent of all students. Among mid-sized institutions, those that enrolled between 1,000 and 4,999 students comprised 33 percent of all institutions and enrolled 18 percent of all students, while those that enrolled between 5,000 and 19,999 students comprised 19 percent of all institutions and enrolled 42 percent of all students.

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are degree-granting institutions established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans. In academic year 2017–18, there were 102 degree-granting 4-year and 2-year HBCUs in operation—51 were public institutions and 51 were private nonprofit institutions.

In addition, for fiscal year 2016 (the most current year for which data are available at time of release) 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

Thirty-four tribal colleges were members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. With few exceptions, tribal colleges are tribally controlled and located on reservations. Seventy-nine percent of the 34 tribally controlled institutions in operation in 2017–18 were public institutions.

Other institutions serving specific populations in 2017 included 37 colleges and universities identified by the Women’s College Coalition as women’s colleges.

Endnotes:

¹ Includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

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/itudes/hsidivision.html>.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 305.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 305.30; *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, 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](#); [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 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