

AQIP Strategy Forum

For institutions participating in an AQIP Strategy Forum with other institutions that have identified as their challenge “improving retention,” these readings may help give everyone some common background. (If you run across others that you would like to see AQIP alert Strategy Forum participants to, send articles or links to sspangehl@hlcommission.org.)

There are three pieces here, two worth reading in full, and the third worth skimming carefully. They are:

Crosling, Heagney, and Thomas, “Improving student retention in higher education:

(an article by two Australian and one British educators, showing that retention is not solely a US issue) page 2

Bissonette , Everyone's Developmentally Delayed, Starting With Us

(a commentary piece that appeared in the Chronicle recently; go to the Chronicle website to read the copious reaction this piece engendered) page 12

The College Board, “Chapter Nine: Dramatically increase college completion rates”

(a long chapter excerpted from an even-longer 2011 College Board report called “The College Completion Agenda” (available from <http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org/reports>) page 16

Improving student retention in higher education

Improving Teaching and Learning

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As a key performance indicator in university quality assurance processes, the retention of students in their studies is an issue of concern world-wide. Implicit in the process of quality assurance is quality improvement. In this article, we examine student retention from a teaching and learning perspective, in terms of teaching and learning approaches that have an impact on students' decisions to continue with or withdraw from their studies. The major need is to engage students in their studies, and in this article we discuss ways that student engagement can be facilitated through the teaching and learning programme in higher education currently.

Introduction

An issue of concern in higher education institutions across the world is the retention and success of students in their studies. This is a particularly pressing issue in the context of widening participation for under-represented student groups, increasing student diversity and educational quality assurance and accountability processes. As well as the personal impact and loss of life chances for students, non-completion has financial implications for students (and their families), and for society and the economy through the loss of potential skills and knowledge. There are also financial and reputational implications for higher education institutions. While students who do not complete may still benefit from skills developed, including increased confidence

and life experiences (Quinn et al., 2005), in the current competitive and globalised higher education market, the reputational fall-out of low student retention and high student attrition figures can be damaging for institutions (Yorke and Longden, 2004).

The importance of student retention in Australia is underscored by its inclusion via institutional statistics as a key performance indicator in educational quality and in the allocation of the Commonwealth Government's Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. Student attrition and retention rates are defined as '... the percentage of students in a particular year who neither graduate nor continue studying in an award course at the same institution in the following year' (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005). Retention statistics are also used to measure institutions' equity

performance which in turn determines their funding from the Higher Education Equity Support Program. In the UK there are two measures of retention, which are similarly narrow, and these are translated into institutional performance indicators:

'The first is the 'completion rate' – the proportion of starters in a year who continue their studies until they obtain their qualification, with no more than one consecutive year out of higher education. As higher education courses take years to complete, an expected completion rate is calculated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency... A more immediate measure of retention is the proportion of an institution's intake which is enrolled in higher education in the year following their first entry to higher education. This is the 'continuation rate' (National Audit Office, 2007, p. 5).

In the UK, these indicators are contextualised by a 'benchmark' for each institution, which takes account of students' entry qualifications and subjects studied, and thus suggests what the completion and continuation rates ought to be. These factors are also used to allocate funding to support the retention of students in higher education via the core grant.

Students may not continue with their studies for a variety of factors. Research exploring the reasons for student withdrawal tends to conclude that there is rarely a single reason why students leave. In most cases, the picture is complex and students leave as a result of a combination of inter-related factors. Echoing the findings of an Australian study, (Long, Ferrier and Heagney, 2006), a synthesis of UK research on student retention (Jones, 2008) identified the following categories of reasons why students withdraw: poor preparation for higher education; weak institutional and/or course match, resulting in poor fit and lack of commitment; unsatisfactory academic experience; lack of social integration; financial issues; and personal circumstances. Thus, some students withdraw for reasons beyond the jurisdiction of the institution, including personal reasons and changed personal circumstances, wrong or 'second choice' course selection and movement to other courses that meet their interests and aspirations more directly.

From this perspective, while the value of statistics solely as a reflection of educational quality seems questionable, the concept of continual improvement is implicit in accountability and quality assurance processes and in funding via the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (Walshe, 2008). This then leads to consideration of the impact and effect of the quality

assurance activity (Stensaker, 2008), of how 'the core processes of higher education – teaching and learning – are improved' (Stensaker, 2008, p. 60) – and the impact this has on student retention and success rates.

Despite the unstated objective of improvement in quality assurance and in the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, which aims to reward excellence, it is not clear how statistics might promote improvement (Walshe, 2008, p. 275). Stensaker (2008) has argued that to achieve quality teaching and learning emanating from quality assurance, there needs to be movement beyond definitions and technical processes, with attention placed on good teaching and learning practice, which should then underpin statistical improvement. For student retention, the more micro-level issues involve outlining the teaching and learning factors that promote student continuation with their studies. While factors such as the personal and course selection are largely beyond the power of the teachers, they may ask what they can do to enhance the possibility of students continuing with their studies.

The phenomenon of breaking student retention into its component parts from a teaching and learning perspective provides guidance for institutions and teachers in educational quality improvement. In this article we discuss factors that have an impact on student retention from the teaching and learning view, of which the most significant is the students' experience of university (Scott, 2005) and the need for students to be engaged in their studies. Drawing on the premise of our recent publication (Crosling, Thomas and Heagney, 2008) and that also espoused by Tinto (2005) of the range of factors in contemporary higher education that have an impact on students' retention. These include: pre-entry information, preparation and admission processes; induction and transition support; learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum development; social engagement; student support, including financial and pastoral services; and improved use of institutional data (Jones, 2008). The academic experience, and in particular the teaching, learning and assessment practices are within the control of teachers. We point out that what goes on in the teaching and learning programme is significant in student retention.

In Australia and world-wide, student engagement is generally acknowledged as a key factor in student retention, and enhancing student engagement is a fundamental strategy for improving student retention, success and outcomes (McInnes and James, 1995; Horstmannshof and Zimitat, 2007; Chen, Lattica and

Hamilton, 2008). Krause and Coates (2008) point out that in first year studies, it is crucial to encourage and assist student engagement as the foundation for successful study in later years. Student engagement is defined as a student's academic commitment and application (Horstmannshoff and Zimitat, 2007, citing Astin, 1984) and shown in time and energy devoted to activities that are educationally purposeful. This also connotes the quality of student effort and students studying for meaning and understanding (Marton and Saljo, 1984) thus reflecting a constructivist approach to learning (Lawrence, 2005).

However, engagement is not the sole responsibility of the student as it concerns students interacting with the learning environment (Bryson and Hand, 2007), rather than being passive within it. Thus managers and teachers have some responsibility to provide a setting that facilitates students' engagement and learning, that 'gets students to participate in activities that lead to success' (Kuh, 2003, cited in Kezar and Kinzie, 2005, p. 150).

In our publication (Crosling, Thomas and Heagney, 2008), we point out the value of student-responsive curriculum development as a means to promote student engagement. This refers to students being immersed in authentic curriculum contents and tasks that are challenging and relevant to students' lives and futures, appropriate orientation or induction procedures, and the integration of study skills. Concurrently, students benefit from collaborative learning situations, where learning is active and interactive between students and their peers in and outside the classroom, as well as with the teachers. Formative assessment is crucial, providing immediate and relevant information for students' academic development needs at the particular point in time.

Further to this, Chen et al. (2008) argue that academic success which underpins student retention requires more than acquisition of knowledge, and that the classroom is an important introductory point for helping students to begin to master key disciplinary concepts. In support of this, Meyer and Land (2005) put forward the pivotal role of students' understandings of what they call disciplinary threshold concepts for academic survival and success. The implication here is that the classroom needs to include active and

interactive learning as the basis for developing understanding of core disciplinary concepts, and these underpin academic success with strong implications for student retention.

There is thus a 'dynamic interplay' (Bryson and Hand, 2007) between student engagement, the quality of student learning and the teaching and learning context. In support of this view, Chen et al. (2008) identify engagement as being composed of the two aspects of the degree of time and effort students use for education, but also the 'way an institution organises learning opportunities and services' (Chen et al, 2008, p. 340) so as to encourage students to take part in and thus benefit from activities. The curriculum in a broad sense, or the teaching and learning programme, provides an ideal forum for approaches and strategies that encour-

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age students to engage, as it is experienced in one form or another by all students (Crosling, Thomas and Heagney, 2008).

Tinto (2000) also points out that the class room is often the only setting in which students meet other students and their teachers. Tinto (2000) expands on some conditions that underpin students' engagement and thus their persistence in their studies. These include the institution and teachers holding high expectations of students in their learning, but also recognising that many commencing students may not be adequately prepared for the rigours of academic study and the concurrent need for academic support, especially in disciplinary contexts, that help students to 'know the rules' (Tinto, 2000, p. 91). According to Tinto, feedback about academic performance is important for students in academic success, and involvement with fellow students in learning in the classroom (Tinto, 2000).

The current interest in student engagement has occurred in a climate where higher education has moved to a massified system with fewer resources so that over decades, there has been concern about the development of student learning in the higher education teaching and learning context. For instance, Kezar and Kinzie, (2005, p. 149) cite Altbach (1997) that these factors have contributed to increased movement towards the lecture method of teaching from the early part of the last century in America, which has led to less interaction between students and teachers, and several higher education commentators have noted

that learning is less likely to occur in such large, impersonal and passive learning environments (Astin, 1993; Chickering, and Gamson, 1987, cited in Kezar and Kinzie, 2005, p. 149). Supporting this, Brysen and Hand (2007) point out that engagement can be fostered by student-centred conceptual orientation compared with teacher centred content orientation in teaching.

Curriculum development

The curriculum is experienced by all students, albeit in different forms. Indeed, for many non-traditional student groups the formal learning experience is the majority or only part of their student experience. In other words, because they live off campus, study at a distance and/or part-time, and/or have work and family responsibilities, they might not be able to participate in extra curricular activities, social and sporting events and informal learning and socialising. There is a body of evidence from the US (and increasingly in other countries) that the more students interact with other students and staff, the more likely they are to persist (e.g. Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1997). Furthermore, both social and academic integration into a higher education institution have a positive impact on their sense of belonging to (Reay et al., 2001), and ultimately retention within, that environment (Thomas, 2002).

Despite different modes of delivery and forms across disciplines, the curriculum forms a platform for the implementation of approaches and strategies that engage students in their university experience. The notion of curriculum is used in divergent ways both within and across HE systems, and often without a shared understanding of its meaning (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006). We are using the term here in a broad way, to include learning, teaching, assessment, academic support and induction, as well as programme contents. We view the curriculum as the primary way to engage students both academically and socially, and to build institutional commitment (Berger & Braxton, 1998) and belonging (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Read et al., 2003; Thomas 2002).

Several factors are important in improving student retention and success:

Orientation and induction

Traditionally higher education institutions have offered new students a 'Welcome' or 'Freshers' week on arrival. Using teacher-centred methods of communication, the emphasis has been on conveying the

status of the institution and overloading students with information. More recently, there has been greater recognition of the need to induct students into the wider higher education environment via more student-centred strategies to enable students to learn about and understand the expectations and culture of higher education (Yorke and Thomas 2003; Crosling, 2003). Some institutions are now introducing 'longer and thinner' induction that starts earlier and lasts beyond a week (Layer et al., 2002, Thomas et al., 2002b).

This provides a more effective opportunity for new students to assimilate and make sense of the information provided, to socialise with the staff and existing students through a range of activities and to feel that they belong in the higher education community at their institution (Thomas et al., 2005b). Early engagement could include the provision of timetables, course handbooks and reading lists, summer schools, or materials accessed via a virtual learning environment. Early engagement can benefit students by preparing them for their course, demonstrating what will be expected of them, and assisting them to feel a part of the institution. Institutions are increasingly interacting with students prior to entry to develop institutional and course commitment and engagement.

Integration of the induction process into the subject specific curriculum helps students to learn in the context of their discipline (Ward, Crosling & Marangos, 2000). For example, some institutions have an accredited first semester induction module, which is discipline based, and involves group work to explore aspects of the transition process. This can be assessed using transparent and formative approaches to allow students to develop the skills and understanding of learning in higher education, whilst also developing their subject-based knowledge. Such approaches to induction enable students to adjust their expectations of learning, teaching and assessment, and encourage staff to use learning and teaching strategies that enable students to engage and feel included in their studies. This requires a responsiveness to students, and a student-centred, rather than a teacher-centred, approach to the learning process.

Authentic curriculum

The curriculum is usually situated within a discipline, which determines the curriculum contents and the disciplinary norms and expectations that shape the academic culture and values and the ways of learning which are expected or assumed. A significant factor

in students' success or otherwise in their learning in higher education and in the disciplines is the intention with which they approach their studies (Marton and Saljo, 1976). This affects the degree to which the students engage with their subjects. If they study with a 'deep' approach, they are seeking understanding and meaning. Alternatively, with a 'surface' approach, students have the intention of rote-learning information, without linking knowledge and understandings. A strategic or achieving approach is one where the intention is to obtain a high grade (Biggs 1987). Arguably, students who are engaged, deriving meaning and understanding from their studies and therefore demonstrating a deep approach to learning, are more likely to continue.

It is argued that the curriculum ought to be culturally relevant to support widening participation and to prepare graduates for living and working in a diverse society (Crosling, Edwards & Schroder, 2008). For example, Dibben (2004) explores the influence of socio-economic background on students' experiences of studying music. A small number of students felt that they did not fit into the department, and believed the curriculum was 'too traditional' (as it focused on classical music). In relation to working class mature students Bamber & Tett (2001) recommend that relevant course material is used. Similarly, Haggis & Pouget (2002) suggest that to support first generation entrants, links need to be made between the curriculum and students' own experiences and views of the world. Houghton & Ali (2000) explore the development and delivery of a culturally relevant curriculum with Asian women, and encourage students to offer feedback about their educational provision to assist future development of the curriculum.

The curriculum can also be relevant to students' future aspirations - to help build institutional commitment (Berger & Braxton, 1998) by reinforcing how successful completion of the course will lead to, for example, a chosen career area. Blackwell et al. (2001) argue that the higher education curriculum should offer students the opportunity to reflect on employment and other experiences to explore the learning and skills development that is involved in these activities. Barrie (2005) similarly argues that the undergraduate curriculum from the first year onwards should assist students to develop 'graduate attributes', which, amongst other things, will assist them in future employment, and life more generally. The need for learning and teaching to develop personal, social and employability skills is supported by empirical research with 400 stu-

dents at the start of their course and following graduation (Glover et al., 2002). Glover et al. argue that the extension of partnerships between higher education and employers are essential to improve the employability of graduates.

Purcell et al. (2002) suggest that work placements offer both students and employers opportunities: students gain valuable skills and demonstrable competencies and employers are able to recruit graduates from a wider pool. In addition, students are increasingly engaged in part-time employment, and so this offers a way to capitalise on this experience, and better prepare students for graduation (not just in terms of employment but more generally). Thus, part of the learning experience should prepare students for graduation in the broadest sense and should contribute to the validity and authenticity of the curriculum for all students.

Student-centred active learning

There is a consensus that interactive as opposed to didactic teaching improves academic success and promotes the inclusion of learners who might feel like outsiders (Crosling, As-Saber & Rahman, 2008; Parker et al., 2005; Haggis & Pouget, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Bamber & Tett, 2001). Student-centred learning conceives of students as playing a more active role in their learning processes. Active learning is often associated with experiential, problem-based and project-based learning, and other forms of collaborative learning, and less reliance on the large lecture format. Kolb's (Kolb, 1984) work on the theoretical foundations of experiential learning can be seen to underlie all of these approaches to learning (Tight, 2002, p.106). Broadly, experiential learning relates to the knowledge and skills gained through life and work experience, but different interpretations have extended the notion of experiential learning to 'meaningful discovery' learning (Boydell, 1976). This has given rise to approaches such as problem-based and project-based learning, which are educational approaches that make use of the learning strategies suggested by the theories of experiential learning within the classroom context. These forms of teaching promote collaboration among students to solve problems, and by using realistic problems or situations for learning, a deeper understanding of the relationship between theory and practice can be developed and understood by students (Tight, 2002, p. 108).

The benefits of student-centred learning that includes greater staff-student and peer interaction can

be understood in relation to the social and emotional dimension of learning. This engagement influences students' sense of belonging and their motivation and achievement (Thomas, 2002; Askham, 2004; Košir & Pecjak, 2005). Pedagogies that involve students as active learners, rather than as recipients of knowledge, show respect for students' views and experiences, and therefore diversity and difference is less likely to be problematised and more likely to be valued within a transformative model of higher education (Bamber et al., 1997; Jones and Thomas, 2005). Tinto found that students benefited from and enjoyed being part of 'learning communities', which forged interaction between students to facilitate their learning both inside the classroom and beyond (Tinto, 1998, 2000). Similarly Warren (2003) reviews existing literature and finds that student-centred, discussion-based and group-based learning activities promote:

- Enhanced student participation and interaction.
- More willingness by students to express their ideas.
- Improved communication among students in culturally diverse classes.
- Better adjustment to university study (for international and UK students).
- A shift towards deep learning as a space is created for learners to test out new concepts.
- Increased motivation, quality of discussion and level of analysis (from Warren, 2003, p. 3).

Student-centred interactive learning does not only have to occur in small groups, but methods can be developed and utilised to teach large classes too. Warren (2003) identifies different methods that have been employed with large groups of students:

- Collaborative learning groups (3–5 students) working on tasks during lecture periods.
- Group presentations and interactive lectures featuring discussion of concepts and application to practical exercises.
- Teaching via sessions that combine exposition and work on tasks in medium-sized groups (about 20 students), instead of whole class lectures.
- Resource-based learning in project study groups (6–10 students), culminating in a set of class debates to exchange knowledge gained. (From Warren, 2003, p. 4)

It is the development and utilisation of such learning and teaching strategies that promote a more active, student-centred approach to learning, which draws on students' previous experiences and interests, that helps to enhance student engagement, course commit-

ment and retention on the programme. ICT can offer teaching staff new ways to develop problem-based and project-base learning activities.

Integration of study skills

There are different models of providing study skills and academic support. Warren (2002) identifies three ways of providing academic support: separate, semi-integrated and integrated curriculum models, and similarly Earwaker (1993) identifies traditional pastoral, professional and an integrated curriculum model as ways of providing both academic and pastoral support. Research on widening participation points towards the value of integrated models, particularly of academic support, with the provision of one-to-one support (Bamber & Tett, 2001; Comfort et al., 2002) and access to additional support as required (Comfort et al., 2002).

Similarly, Warren argues that a mix of semi-integrated and integrated models of curriculum provision offers better prospects for helping a wide spectrum of students to succeed at university. Integrated approaches are favoured as research shows that many students who would benefit from academic and other support services are reluctant to put themselves forward (Dodgson and Bolam, 2002), therefore a proactive or integrated approach helps to reach all students. Layer et al. (2002) found that many higher education institutions with a commitment to wider access and above benchmark levels of retention have one-stop-shop student services. This type of provision not only makes it easier for students to access academic and pastoral services, but it also encourages students to use the facilities by including services that all students may need to access and which are not stigmatising (e.g. accommodation office, sport and recreation, registry etc.) (see Thomas et al., 2002a).

Formative assessment

Many students struggle to make the transition from a more structured learning experience in schools and colleges to the greater autonomy in higher education. Pedagogical research, especially with non-traditional students, reports that formative assessment offers an integrated and structured approach to equipping all students with the information and skills they need to make a successful transition into higher education and to continue to succeed academically. For example, George et al. (2004) found that the nature of assessment used was significant to students' experience and

engagement with the course. They suggest that the incorporation of both summative and formative assessment helps to build confidence, a positive attitude towards learning and successful engagement with the cognitive demands of the programme. Similarly, Bamber & Tett (1999) found that non-traditional students, and particularly mature learners, benefited from formative feedback. For example, formative assessment can offer students:

- Space to explore, try out different approaches and develop their own ideas.
- An opportunity to become aware of their own progress and find out about themselves as learners.
- An opportunity to negotiate with tutors and/or peers on matters of assessment including the allocation of marks (Povey & Angier, 2004).

Formative feedback is integrated into the learning experience, and so does not detract from discipline-focused teaching and it reaches all students, not just those who have the knowledge and confidence to seek support. Furthermore, formative feedback provides a vehicle for interaction between students and staff, thus helping to develop student familiarity and confidence to approach staff for additional clarification and

guidance if necessary. Feedback information can also be used by staff to realign their teaching in response to learners' needs. Formative feedback offers an integrated approach to providing students with clarity about what is expected of them, and a way of engaging with peers and teaching staff to discuss academic

issues in a safe environment so that they develop the skills, understanding and integration they need to succeed. Furthermore, formative assessment can be used to promote an active approach to learning, as students are encouraged to reflect on the learning process, rather than just the outcomes.

Teaching and Learning and students from under-represented groups

It can be argued that what goes on in the teaching and learning programme, that is the learning, teaching and assessment practices, play a even more important role in the retention and success of students from under-

represented groups (Yorke in Ferrier and Heagney (eds) 2008). For many of these students, time constraints mean the classroom is the only element of university life they experience. In Australia this is particularly so for the large number of students with work and family responsibilities. A 2001 national study revealed that approximately 70 per cent of full time students worked nearly 15 hours per week (Long and Hayden, 2001). Consequently, it is in the classroom that the opportunity to engage students is either made or lost.

Teachers – know your students

This seems an obvious dictum but it is not always easy to achieve when much university teaching takes place in large lecture theatres. Whilst it is widely accepted that teachers can no longer assume all students have the same background knowledge, it is very difficult to structure classroom learning to incorporate the interests and experience of all students when teachers don't know their students. However, imaginative use of curriculum can go a long way to meeting this need.

For instance a lecturer at Monash Malaysia wished to develop the cultural understandings of his engineering students who came from many different backgrounds.

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He also wished to provide a setting in which they could improve their confidence in their English language and communication skills, both of which are important for engineering graduates once they enter the work force. He organised the students to work together in small groups and give presentations to

the class on the cultural backgrounds of each of the members of their small teams. This gave them opportunities to make social connections while hearing about the diverse backgrounds of their classmates. The students developed increased tolerance of each other and a fuller understanding of cultural diversity as well as improved English language and presentation skills (Teoh, in Crosling, Thomas and Heagney (eds) 2008, pp. 52–6).

Programme organisation

When teachers know something of the lived experience of their students, they can organise teaching programmes which facilitate the students' maximum

participation. Questions which teachers can ask of themselves to effect this outcome include:

- Do you know which students have family responsibilities and which students have work responsibilities?
- Do you consider students work and family responsibilities when you schedule assignments and examinations? For example, are assignments and class tests due at the end of the school holidays when students who are parents have their school aged children at home with them?
- Do you arrange for all assignments to be completed at the same time assuming that students have all day and part of the night to do them?
- Do you organise guest lectures at times that suit students with work and family commitments?

Same classroom – different cultures

At another level, classrooms and lecture theatres provide teachers with opportunities to model inclusivity by eliminating local jargon from their speech, using global events to illustrate their points rather than references to the local football team or pub. In many cases a student's appearance can alert teachers to the fact that they need to employ these broader approaches to their teaching. But there are many students from diverse backgrounds whose appearance does not prompt teachers to make their teaching more inclusive.

Other cultural issues

The classroom provides lecturers with opportunities to link into students' values such as the value of work, struggle, persistence, and resilience.

Some students who are first in their family to access higher education also have overcome barriers such as poverty, poor primary and secondary education experiences to get into university. Many have extraordinary persistence and resilience which, if acknowledged by their teachers, can assist in engaging them in their studies. Similarly refugee students from war-torn countries may have exhibited great courage in re-locating to a new country. How often are their experiences outside the classroom acknowledged?

Practical issues

There are very practical strategies lecturers can employ in the classroom to assist students, particularly those from under-represented groups, to succeed and persist at university. By talking about student support services in their first lectures for the year, teachers can play an important role in linking students to relevant

supports such as counselling, disability services and career advice. While equity group students tend to need and use support services more than non-equity group students, they often lack the confidence to go and seek them out for themselves

Conclusion

Quality assurance and accountability are integral to higher education in Australia and globally. One significant indicator of this is the retention of students in their studies. In this article, we point out that the collection of statistical data alone is limited in its impact on educational quality improvement, which is implicit in quality assurance objectives. One way to improve quality in regard to student retention is to identify influences and causes of student retention and attrition. Engaging students in their studies has been identified as important in retaining students and stemming attrition. Institutions have also shared responsibility to facilitate student engagement.

Various teaching and learning approaches to encourage students to engage with their studies and their institution have been surveyed in this article and include:

- Early engagement through pre- and post-entry induction activities.
- Greater understanding of the diversity of students, including where they have come from, what they are interested in and their aspirations. This in turn can inform the organisation of the programme and curricular contents.
- Authentic and relevant curricula, building on students' previous experiences, interests and future aspirations, and using inclusive language and relevant examples.
- Student-centred active learning designed to involve students in the learning process.
- Integration of study skills to support the success of all students, and signing posting students to access other support services as necessary.
- Formative feedback which is relevant and integrated into the learning experience in a timely and constructive way.

There are many reasons why students leave higher education early, some of which may not be wholly negative, but there are usually financial implications for withdrawing students and there may be other personal consequences. Similarly, there are pecuniary and reputational implications for institutions. Some reasons why students leave are beyond the control of

institutions, but the organisation and delivery of the curriculum is an area over which universities and colleges have significant autonomy. Addressing student retention via learning, teaching and curricular developments has the advantage of meeting the needs of all students – not just those either identified as at risk, or who proactively seek additional support.

In the context of equality and diversity legislation, the requirement for institutions in the UK is to proactively make anticipatory changes, which promote the success of all students. In Australia, the mandate is for specialised provision but not necessarily anticipatory and higher education institutions provide tailored support for under-represented/disadvantaged groups of students. Both of these approaches help to shift the institutional response away from a deficit approach by implementing practices which assist all students to improve and prosper – irrespective of their starting position.

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August 14, 2011

Everyone's Developmentally Delayed, Starting With Us

By Tom Bissonette

Throughout my almost 20 years as a college psychotherapist and mental-health administrator, I generally adopted an analytical approach to therapy. When I first began counseling students, I wanted to "cure" them of their neuroses, or at least analyze them into functioning better. Initially, this seemed effective, because there were plenty of students who exhibited symptoms of bona fide psychiatric diagnoses.

After a couple of years in my clinical comfort zone, though, I began to feel I was missing something. As my caseload increased, the types of students referred to me began to change. Many would attend a few sessions and leave counseling without informing me of their intent. It was a bit vexing because things always seemed to get off to a good start. I struggled with this for several months until I had an epiphany while lecturing in my then-new adolescent-development class. I was introducing the class to the concept of "asynchrony" in human development, and the idea I was teaching them finally pierced my thick Freudian skull. Eureka! Those counseling clients, and virtually all students who were having difficulty in college, seemed to have one thing in common: They were out of sync with their own development.

One by one I reviewed cases and saw the same pattern—one or more areas of developmental delay interfering with college success. Some students were academically prepared for college, but not socially. They were either oversocializing to make up for lost time, or they would study excessively to the neglect of their social development. Either way, several ended up leaving college or transferring because they failed academically, or felt isolated and lonely.

Others were socially adept but were unprepared cognitively. They did well academically in high school with more supervision and, of course, with the recent emphasis on rote learning. However, when they were expected to think critically or independently, they were stymied. They, as well as the others, belonged to a generation that arrived at college with beliefs that were inculcated in the polarized, treacherous political and cultural minefields of recent decades.

Whether they leaned left or right, they didn't trust our institution.

Perhaps most frequently, I saw students who had serious delays in emotional development. Virtually anything that caused stress disoriented them, and they quickly descended into pre-meltdown conditions. Academic work was the last thing on their minds. They lit up cell towers talking to and texting parents and peers, and they demanded unlimited visits to the counseling center. They would restabilize, often of their own accord, but only long enough to discover how far behind they were in class work. Of course, that information would set off another crisis of hysteria, dropped courses, impending lost scholarships, and so on.

Once I recognized these patterns, I considered possible remedies with unbridled enthusiasm. This occurred around the same time that "retention" was becoming the new buzzword on campuses. So it seemed to me that colleges would welcome any efforts to help students persist to graduation. Once administrators and student-affairs professionals realized the significance of my discoveries, they would embrace this developmental model posthaste. That's when I discovered that higher education itself was—and is—developmentally delayed.

Many, if not most, faculty members and those who employ them still seem to believe their primary mission is to disseminate "expert" information. Colleges hire professors and instructors who have no pedagogical education or training and who are often profoundly lacking in knowledge of human development as well. Ironically, the further one advances in the academic hierarchy, the less one is expected to know about teaching and those who are taught. It becomes easy to blame parents, or primary and secondary education, and to conclude that college is not for everyone and a degree will be worthless if just anybody can get one.

There is some truth to this; a college degree should reflect academic excellence and the self-discipline it takes to succeed in a long-term, complex endeavor. Paradoxically, though, the students who possess these attributes at the time of their initial enrollment are sometimes the least in need of the services that faculty could provide. These well-prepared new scholars could excel with minimal guidance and mentoring. The less prepared need the time and attention of highly skilled teachers who know how to teach them how to learn.

I don't believe most educators are deliberately trying to avoid the demands of our changing institutions. I think we are just lagging behind our social progress as usual, and many lack the training to make this paradigm shift. We have chosen to make college more

inclusive, but we haven't yet developed the protocols to assess new students and help them get up to speed quickly. It is unrealistic to believe that most students whose parents did not go to college, those with learning disabilities or mental disorders, and Gen Y students (a whole article or book in itself) could matriculate without focused support.

In just a few decades we have morphed from *in loco parentis* to sink or swim. This seemed to work adequately until we decided as a society that college was essential for every young person to thrive in a highly competitive, postmillennial socioeconomic environment. We have opened the floodgates; this is both a cause for celebration and a compelling reason to know the level of preparedness of each student as he or she enters the system.

The first day students enter college, many are in the throes of a developmental crisis. They should be assessed in several areas, including their academic ability, social skills, study skills, vocabulary, general knowledge, work history, and community involvement. The results of these assessments would be used to identify the types of support they will need to succeed. This data and interviews with the student can lead to a learning contract between the student and the institution. Participation should be voluntary, but students who opt out would be required to sign a waiver stating they were informed about any concerns and offered appropriate services. This individualized approach would bolster many students and increase their chances for academic success.

Granted, such an ambitious effort would seem to increase the workload for faculty and staff; no doubt, establishing such a program would take time and effort. It would also require a total buy-in from the administration, faculty, and staff. In a relatively short time, however, they would start to notice welcome differences in their daily activity. Professors would spend less time grading substandard papers. Students would participate in class discussions with more intellectual curiosity and civility. Student-affairs personnel would spend less time on discipline and more time on the holistic positive growth of students. Attrition would decrease, and we could stop maintaining the illusion that we are working hard on retention.

For those who might think I'm discounting their efforts at retention, I want to be clear: It is the concept itself that's misguided. When we put resources into students after problems surface, we take resources away from other students who may be slipping through the cracks. For every student we save, we may lose a couple more. The word "retention" is institution-centered instead of student-

centered. The premise was that the college would retain the students rather than the students choosing to stay in the college because of their internalized goals and actions. By becoming partners with students on the front end, we decrease the odds that they will later be unable to persist.

Decades upon decades of scientific inquiry into human development tells us that people stay in situations when they feel safe, empowered, and validated. They leave when they feel threatened, inadequate, and frustrated. We don't need more research; we need to move from "sink or swim" to being more vigilant lifeguards for our students.

Tom Bissonette is a retired staff member and adjunct professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.


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cwm4c 4 months ago

Interesting and right on point--noticed that the CHE almost made your point by publishing this article the same day:

<http://chronicle.com/article/D...>

Like




cwm4c 4 months ago in reply to cwm4c

"Colleges hire professors and instructors who have no pedagogical education or training and who are often profoundly lacking in knowledge of human development as well. Ironically, the further one advances in the academic hierarchy, the less one is expected to know about teaching and those who are taught. It becomes easy to blame parents, or primary and secondary education, and to conclude that college is not for everyone and a degree will be worthless if just anybody can get one."

This statement should be required reading for anyone looking to become a professor. I'm continually amazed at colleagues who have never bothered to study or take courses in how people learn or how to teach. The expert mentality courts the belief that only a knowledge of subject matter is needed. I always ask about an applicant's background in this area during our faculty searches--whether seasoned or new. Those without anything are finding it increasingly harder to get hired.

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Danelle Wilbraham 4 months ago in reply to cwm4c

Nine

Dramatically increase
college completion rates

WE RECOMMEND that institutions of higher education set out to dramatically increase college completion rates by improving retention, easing transfer among institutions and implementing data-based strategies to identify retention and dropout challenges.

Increasing college graduation, or completion, rates is essential to reaching the commission's goal. The commission noted that it is imperative for institutions to have the determination to understand why some students do not graduate, with the hope of developing and implementing interventions that will enhance graduation rates across all student groups.

Increasing college completion rates will be more challenging in light of projected demographic changes that vary across states.⁶⁷ The greatest growth in high school graduates will be among groups who historically have not had as much access to or success in higher education. The commission's goal cannot be met without a substantial commitment by states and institutions to eliminate racial and ethnic gaps in degree completion. States will have to develop and differentiate strategies geared toward the particular needs of their population. Policymakers will need to consider the impact of both demographic changes and the current economic crisis in order to implement effective approaches that improve graduation rates.

It is important to understand the difference between educational attainment rates and graduation rates in order to avoid confusing the two concepts. The former is the focus of the commission's overall goal, while the latter is the focus of this recommendation. While graduation rates affect educational attainment rates, the two are distinctly different measures.

Educational attainment is based on the highest level of education completed by an individual, regardless of when or where a person started or finished their education, how long he or she took to earn the degree or whether the individual attended on a part- or full-time basis. These estimates are useful for making judgments about how well educated the United States is in comparison to other nations.

Graduation rates provide important insights into the success of institutions, states and the country as a whole in moving students in a timely manner from the point of entry to degree attainment. As mandated by Congress, they are based on first-time, full-time students entering a two- or four-year college at a specific point in time and graduating from that same institution within a particular amount of time. These estimates provide insights into postsecondary outcomes, but they are not useful for comparing the United States to other nations because of the differences in how graduation rates are defined and calculated in various countries.

In understanding the degree to which the nation is increasing completion rates, three indicators may prove fruitful to policymakers and educators:

- Freshman-to-sophomore retention;
- Graduation rates of associate degree- and certificate-seeking students;
- Graduation rates of bachelor's degree-seeking students; and
- Degrees Awarded at Colleges and Universities.

67. For more details, see *Knocking at the College Door*. (2008). (Boulder: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education).

General Findings for This Recommendation

- As of 2008, 60.0 percent of full-time freshmen at public two-year colleges return for the sophomore year.
- As of 2008, 69.0 percent of full-time freshmen at private, for-profit, two-year colleges return for the sophomore year.
- As of 2008, 78.2 percent of full-time freshmen at public four-year colleges return for the sophomore year.
- As of 2008, 79.1 percent of full-time freshmen at private, not-for-profit, four-year colleges return for the sophomore year.
- As of 2008, 27.5 percent of full-time degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.
- As of 2008, 22.6 percent of full-time African American degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.
- As of 2008, 24.9 percent of full-time American Indian or Alaska Native degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.
- As of 2008, 25.7 percent of full-time Hispanic degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.
- As of 2008, 34.1 percent of full-time degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in four years or less.
- As of 2008, 57.7 percent of full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.
- As of 2008, 38.5 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.
- As of 2008, 40.5 percent of African American full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.
- As of 2008, 49.4 percent of Hispanic full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.
- As of 2008, 60.6 percent of full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in eight years or less.
- As of 2009, the number of associate degrees has increased 36.0 percent from 1,159,550 in 2001 to 1,577,136 in 2009.
- As of 2009, the number of bachelor's degrees has increased 29.6 percent from 2,597,018 in 2001 to 3,366,858 in 2009.
- As of 2009, 1.1 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to American Indians or Alaska Natives.
- As of 2009, 5.3 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- As of 2009, 13.1 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to African Americans.
- As of 2009, 12.7 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to Hispanics.

- As of 2009, 67.8 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to whites.
- As of 2009, 0.8 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to American Indians or Alaska Natives.
- As of 2009, 7.3 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- As of 2009, 9.8 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to African Americans.
- As of 2009, 8.3 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to Hispanics.
- As of 2009, 73.8 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to whites.
- As of 2009, 62.1 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to females.
- As of 2009, 57.3 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to females.
- As of 2009, 19.6 percent of all degrees are awarded in business, management and marketing.
- As of 2009, 17.7 percent of all degrees are awarded in health professions and clinical sciences.
- As of 2009, 9.8 percent of all degrees are awarded in education.
- As of 2009, 3.3 percent of all degrees are awarded engineering.

60.0%

As of 2008, 60.0 percent of full-time freshmen at public two-year colleges return for the sophomore year.

▲ **1.0ppts** 2007–2008

69.0%

As of 2008, 69.0 percent of full-time freshmen at private for-profit two-year colleges return for the sophomore year.

▲ **4.1ppts** 2007–2008

Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention

What is this measure, and why is this measure important? This indicator represents the persistence of students from freshman to sophomore year and provides insights into students' progress through the postsecondary education system. This measure is important in ensuring that students are on track to complete an associate or bachelor's degree in a timely manner.

Retention rates are calculated by aggregating, by sector and/or state, the institution-level adjusted entering cohorts and the number of students from these cohorts that enroll the following fall. Estimates therefore can be interpreted as a percentage of students in the given sector and/or state.

Given that students enter college with a variety of objectives (e.g., work and study versus solely study) and that institutions have varying missions, we have presented a variety of sectors for both full- and part-time students. This provides a more nuanced picture of retention across the nation's institutions — one that is sometimes lost in favor of presenting a single statistic.

What are the policy issues associated with this measure?

Persistence indicators are one of the tools used to better understand the nature of educational progress and the challenges faced by institutions or a state as a whole for increasing educational attainment. In the words of Amy Guidera from the Data Quality Campaign, "We need to use data as a flashlight, not a hammer."⁶⁸ The appropriate context (e.g., institutional mission) should be taken into account when considering whether persistence indicators such as retention can or should be used as accountability measures. These data are aggregated across institutions in order to provide a weighted average for states and the nation. Larger institutions thus have more of an impact on state results. Policymakers should consider the range of institutional outcomes that contribute to overall state figures when developing strategies to improve retention.

Institutions should make every effort to learn from students who are not retained (e.g., through exit surveys) in order to develop policies that result in the best outcomes for the students and for the institutions. Administrators and faculty should examine the ways in which they can improve the transition of new students from the first day of orientation to sophomore year.

68. Guidera, Amy. (2010, June). Speech presented in conjunction with *Education Week's "Diplomas Count"* press conference at the National Press Club, Washington, DC.

78.2%

As of 2008, 78.2 percent of full-time freshmen at public four-year colleges return for the sophomore year.

◀▶ 2007–2008

79.1%

As of 2008, 79.1 percent of full-time freshmen at private not-for-profit four-year colleges return for the sophomore year.

◀▶ 2007–2008

Where are we now? As of 2008, 60.0 percent of full-time, first-time degree- or certificate-seeking freshmen at public two-year colleges are retained from freshman to sophomore year (Figure 9.1a). Part-time students account for approximately four of every 10 freshmen in this sector, and only 40.1 percent of these part-time students return for sophomore year (Figure 9.1b). When disaggregated by state, the full-time freshman-to-sophomore retention rate at public two-year colleges ranges from 47.7 percent in Louisiana to 68.6 percent in California (Figure 9.1c). When placed in rank order, the states with the highest retention rates for this sector are California, North Dakota, South Dakota, Florida and New York. The states with the lowest retention rates are Louisiana, Montana, Alaska, West Virginia and Oklahoma.

As of 2008, 78.2 percent of full-time, first-time degree-seeking freshmen at public four-year colleges are retained from freshman to sophomore year (Figure 9.1a). Part-time students account for a small proportion (roughly 5 percent) of the overall freshmen enrollment in this sector, and 47.7 percent of these part-time students who enter in the fall return for sophomore year (Figure 9.1b). When disaggregated by state, the full-time freshman-to-sophomore retention rate at public four-year colleges ranges from 39.5 percent in the District of Columbia to 86.1 percent in Virginia (Figure 9.1d). When placed in rank order, the states with the highest retention rates for this sector are Virginia, Delaware, New Jersey, California and New Hampshire. The states with the lowest retention rates are District of Columbia, Idaho, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Montana.

As of 2008, 79.1 percent of full-time, first-time degree-seeking freshmen at private not-for-profit four-year colleges are retained from freshman to sophomore year (Figure 9.1a). As in the public four-year sector, part-time students account for only a few percentage points of the first-year enrollment, and 43.6 percent of these part-time students who enter in fall return for sophomore year (Figure 9.1b). When disaggregated by state, the full-time freshman-to-sophomore retention rate at private not-for-profit four-year colleges ranges from 57.2 percent in Delaware to 87.3 percent in the District of Columbia (Figure 9.1e). When placed in rank order, the states with the highest retention rates for this sector are District of Columbia, California, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Connecticut. The states with the lowest retention rates are Delaware, Nevada, Michigan, Kansas and Hawaii.

Despite gains between 2007 and 2008, the full-time freshman-to-sophomore retention rate is lowest among private for-profit four-year colleges, where just under half of freshmen return for sophomore year (Figure 9.1a). Part-time students make up roughly one-quarter of first-time, degree-seeking freshmen in this sector, and 43.2 percent of these part-time students who enter in fall return for sophomore year (Figure 9.1b).

When interpreting this measure, what should be kept in mind? Retention is based solely on continuing within the institution in which one originally enrolled. Students who successfully transfer to other institutions count against the original institution but do not impact the receiving institution.

Caution is warranted when interpreting the estimates related to for-profit and private not-for-profit sectors in this indicator. The number of for-profit institutions grew significantly between fall 2007 and fall 2008 and the underlying enrollment changed as well. This results in less stable estimates for this sector. Also, there are very few private not-for-profit two-year institutions, which also leads to unstable estimates.

Finally, as indicated above, the proportion of first-time students who are enrolled part-time versus full-time varied substantially by sector. For example, part-time students account for a much larger portion of the student enrollment at public two-year colleges compared to public four-year colleges. This should be considered when examining the part- and full-time retention rates for these sectors.

The estimates contained in this report should not be compared against estimates based on the 2003–2006 surveys. Retention rates were collected on the 2003–2006 IPEDS enrollment surveys, but institutions were calculating and reporting retention rates based on different student groups (e.g., full-time students versus all students; original versus adjusted cohort). This led to changes in the 2007 survey, whereby institutions now report the raw numbers for clearly defined cohorts. IPEDS then calculates the rates for institutions based on these raw numbers.

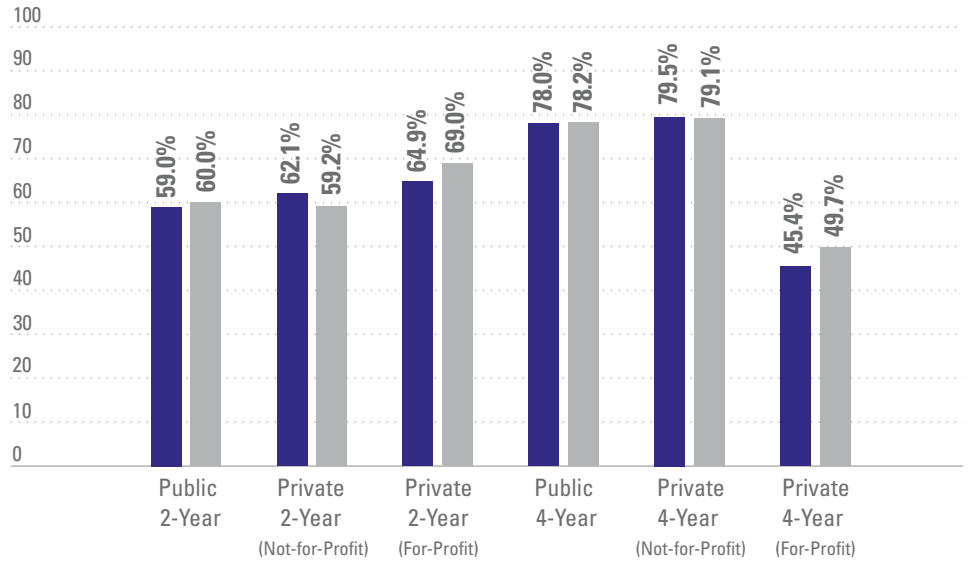
9.1a

National Full-Time Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention Rates, 2007–2008

Updated data source 

Source: NCES IPEDS Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2007–2008

■ 2007
■ 2008



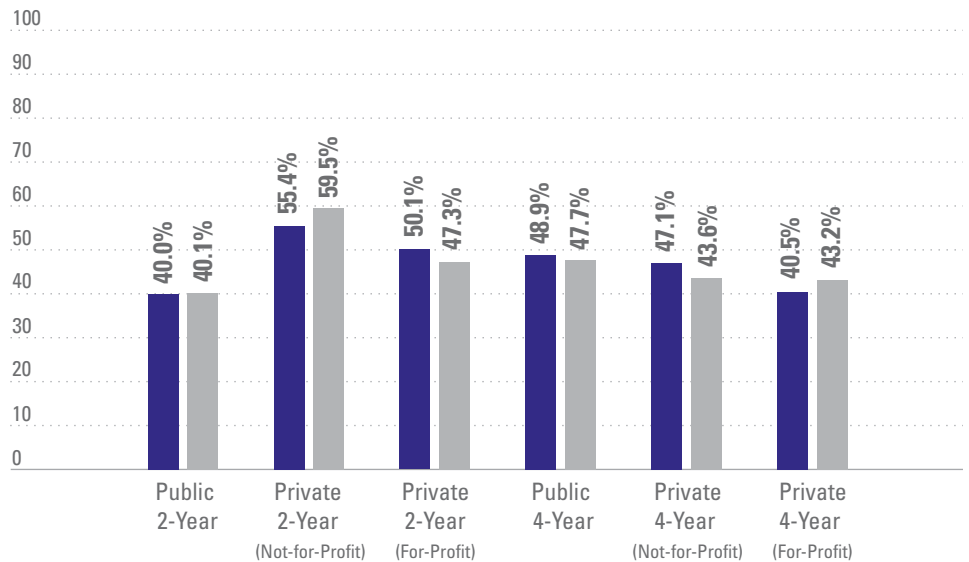
9.1b

National Part-Time Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention Rates, 2007–2008

Updated data source 

Source: NCES IPEDS Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2007–2008

■ 2007
■ 2008



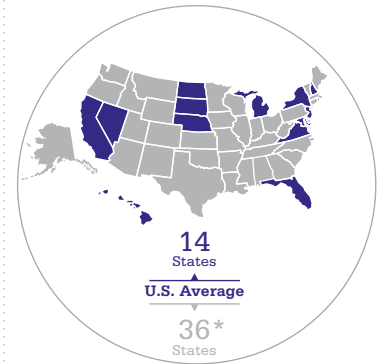
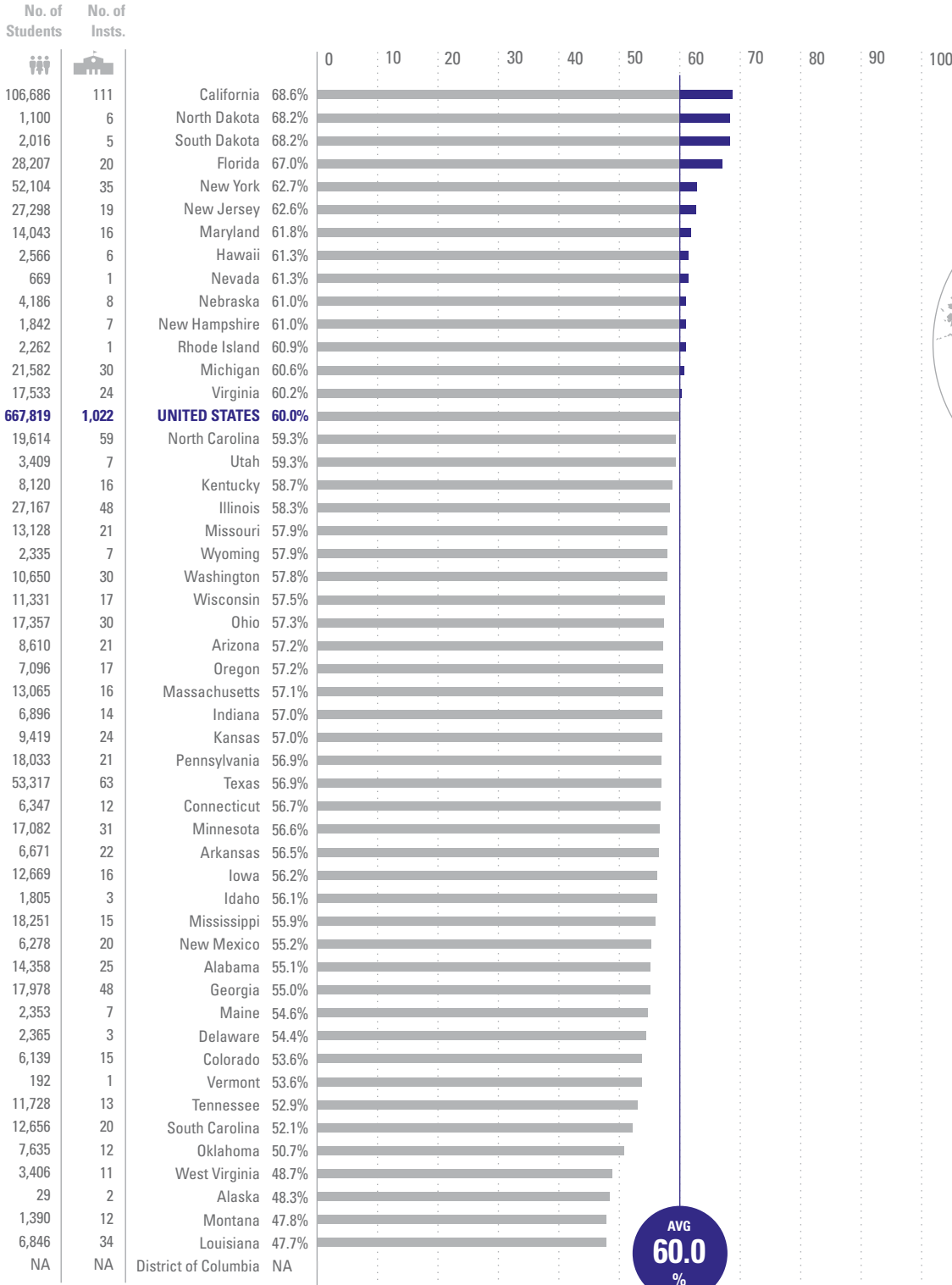
9.1c

Full-Time Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention Rates at Public Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
60.0
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

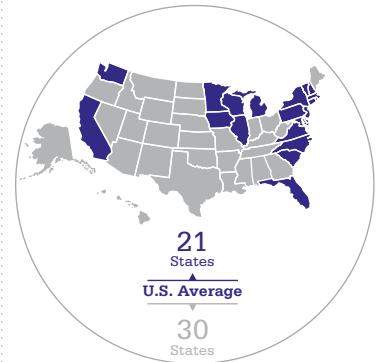
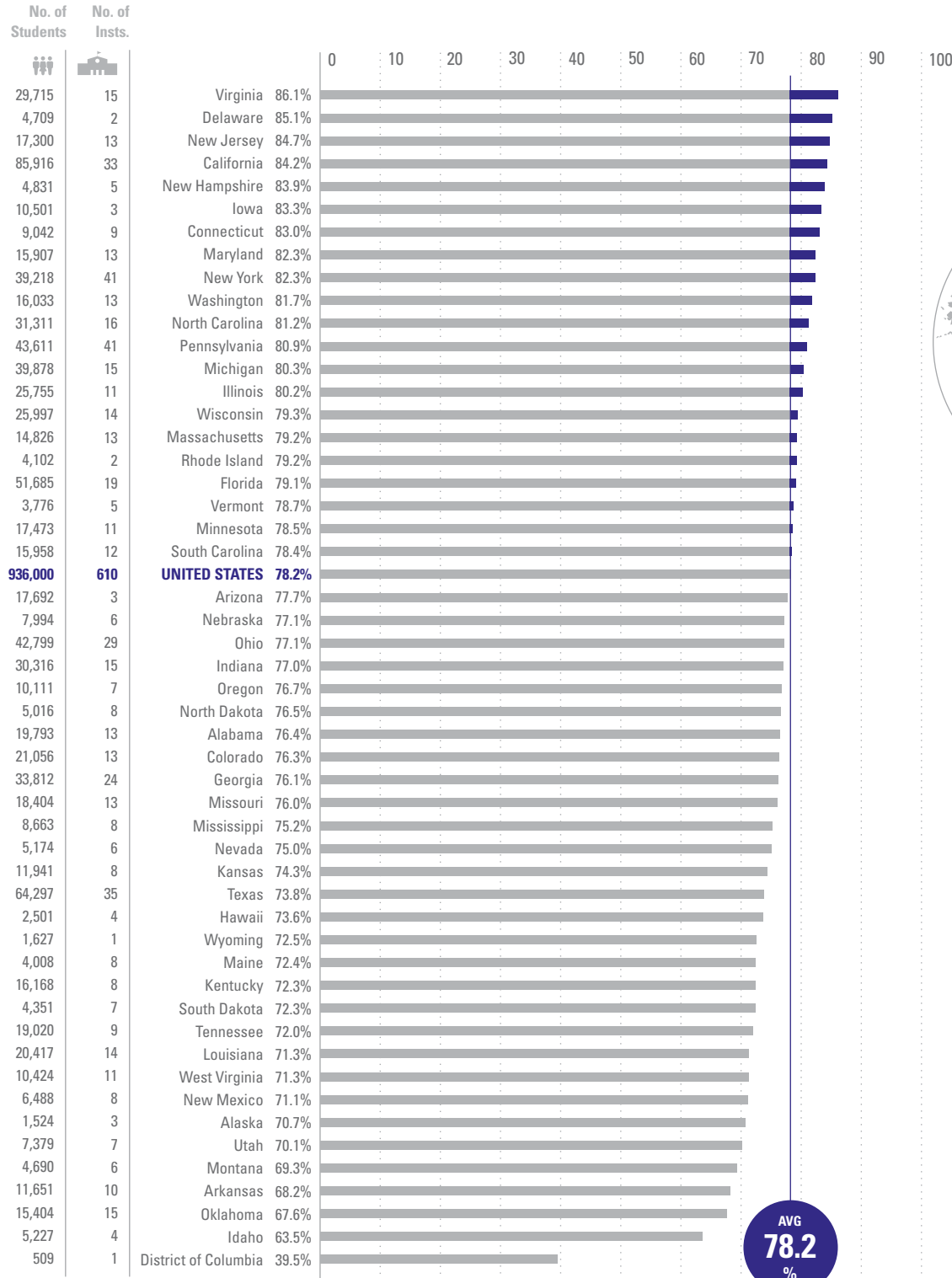
9.1d

Full-Time Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention Rates at Public Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
78.2
%

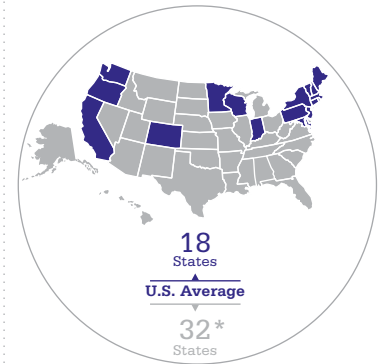
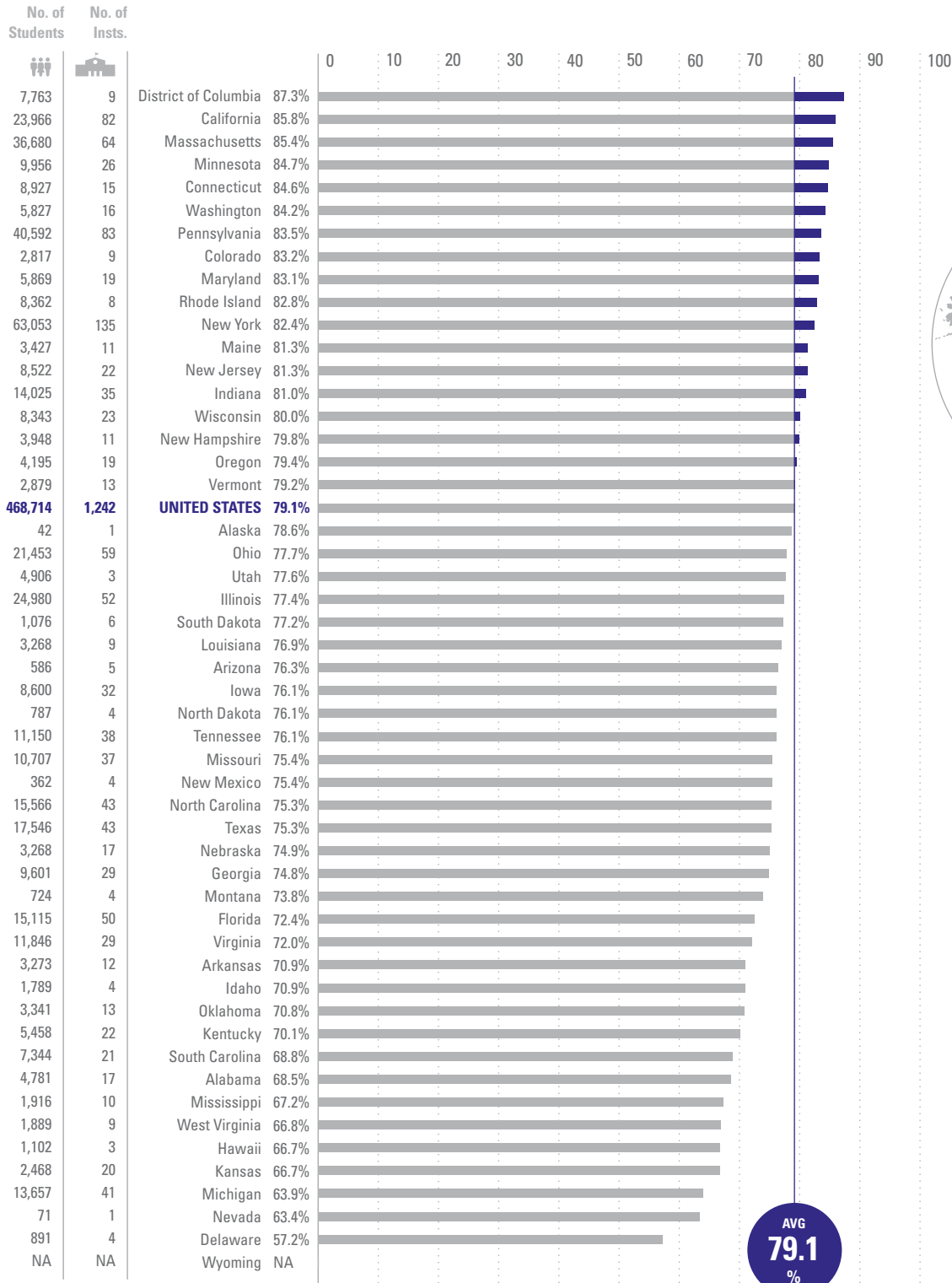
9.1e

Full-Time Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention Rates at Private Not-for-Profit Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Enrollment and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
79.1
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

27.5%

As of 2008, 27.5 percent of full-time degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.

◀▶ 2007–2008

22.6%

As of 2008, 22.6 percent of full-time African American degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.

▼ 3.8ppts 2007–2008

Graduation Rates of Associate Degree– and Certificate-Seeking Students

What is this measure, and why is this measure important? This measure builds upon the retention indicator to provide a more complete picture of the educational progress of college students in the United States. The majority of data in this indicator reflect the proportion of first-time, full-time associate degree- or certificate-seeking students who graduate within 150 percent of normal program length (i.e., three years). In addition, four-year graduation rates (200 percent of normal program length) are available for the first time and are included in this indicator. Graduation rates are calculated by aggregating, across institutions in a given state and/or sector, the institution-level adjusted entering cohorts and the number of students from these cohorts who graduate within the appropriate time frame. Estimates therefore can be interpreted as a percentage of students in the given sector and/or state.

The measure is central to the commission’s goal because of the role that two-year colleges play in the higher education system. This role may become increasingly important because of the changing demographics described in the introduction to this section and the economic challenges faced by a growing number of Americans.

The data are disaggregated by state, race/ethnicity and institutional control (i.e., public, private not-for-profit, private for-profit) to help states understand the differential outcomes across groups and to illustrate the state’s overall graduation rate as a function of the varying performance of students in different types of institutions.

What are the policy issues associated with this measure? Addressing socioeconomic, racial and ethnic inequalities in higher education requires persistent and meaningful efforts by states to provide postsecondary access and opportunity to the steadily growing numbers of undereducated and underrepresented minorities. Beyond the moral imperative to achieve equity among populations of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, there are economic reasons for doing so.

Policymakers should consider both the challenges and opportunities facing two-year colleges in light of current economic conditions. Many adults are returning to the educational pipeline in order to build skills and increase future job opportunities. At the same time, budget cuts threaten funding in this vital sector.

24.9%

As of 2008, 24.9 percent of full-time American Indian or Alaska Native degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.

▲ 3.7ppts 2007–2008

25.7%

As of 2008, 25.7 percent of full-time Hispanic degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in three years or less.

▲ 7.6ppts 2007–2008

Graduation rates have been a part of the higher education landscape since Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know Act in 1990. They are the primary national, standardized measure of postsecondary outcomes. However, policymakers should consider the significance and meaning of high or low graduation rates. The appropriate context should be taken into account when considering whether persistence indicators such as graduation rates can or should be used as accountability measures. Institutions vary in their missions, as well as in the composition of entering students — factors that should be recognized when interpreting estimates, particularly at the institutional level. Institutions that aim to educate low-income, first-generation, traditionally underserved students will face substantially different enrollment, retention and graduation challenges compared to institutions that attract most of their students from the top of the nation's high school graduating classes. Policymakers should seek to understand the benefits and limitations of graduation rates in order to better serve all constituents.

Where are we now? As of 2008, 27.5 percent of first-time, full-time associate degree- or certificate-seeking students in the nation's two-year colleges graduate within three years (Figure 9.2a). This estimate dropped slightly from a high of 30.5 percent in 2003. Graduation rates vary by sector, such that 20.6 percent of these students in public two-year colleges graduate within three years, compared to 48.3 percent and 57.7 percent at private not-for-profit and for-profit two-year colleges, respectively. Public institutions account for nearly four out of five first-time, full-time students at two-year colleges and thus shape states' overall estimates.

Three-year graduation rates of first-time, full-time students at two-year colleges vary by race/ethnicity and sector (Figures 9.2b, 9.2g–9.2k). Asian students have the highest three-year graduation rate (31.5 percent), followed by white students (28.5 percent), Hispanic students (25.7 percent), American Indian students (24.9 percent), and African American students (22.6 percent). When disaggregated by state, the three-year graduation rate at two-year colleges ranges from 9.0 percent in Delaware to 60.0 percent in Wyoming (Figure 9.2c). Private for-profit institutions greatly influence overall three-year graduation rates in states such as Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Wyoming (Figure 9.2f).

When comparing three-year graduation rates against four-year graduation rates, it is clear that the additional year affords a substantial number of students the opportunity to complete their degrees. For example, while 27.8 percent of first-time, full-time associate degree- or certificate-seeking students who entered in fall 2004 graduate within three years (Figure 9.2a), 34.1 percent of these students graduate within four years (Figure 9.2l). When disaggregated by state, the four-year graduation rate ranges from 18.0 percent in Delaware to 74.1 percent in South Dakota (Figure 9.2m).

34.1%

As of 2008, 34.1 percent of full-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students at two-year colleges graduate in four years or less.

When interpreting this measure, what should be kept in mind?

Because of the manner in which data are collected in the IPEDS graduation survey, researchers are unable to separate associate degree-seeking students from certificate-seeking students. One concern is that the normal time to completion varies across certificate programs, whereas it is more standardized for associate programs. Given the emphasis of the commission goal on obtaining an associate degree or higher, data would ideally be presented for associate degree-seeking students only. This presents a challenge for using this indicator to examine issues related to degree attainment among students at two-year colleges.

The limitations of these graduation rates deserve consideration. For example, as was the case with the previous indicator, graduation rates are based solely on degree completion within the institution in which one enrolled as a full-time, first-time student. In addition, they do not reflect part-time students, students who begin college in terms other than fall, or incoming transfer students who go on to successfully complete a degree. In fact, successful transfer students count against the original institution's graduation rate (which also influences estimates at the state level) and do nothing to benefit the receiving institution. Many policymakers and researchers have called for reforms to standardize the way that transfer rates are measured and reported by states and institutions. Because of the lack of the standardization of transfer rates, this indicator is not yet available to help contextualize the nation's success in increasing completion rates.

It is also important to consider that graduation rates are associated with many other factors not directly addressed in these data (e.g., first-generation status, academic preparation, socioeconomic background, adjustment to college, etc.). In addition, many students take longer than the traditional two-to-three year window to graduate, including students who begin as full-time students but spend most of their experience attending part time and students who must work while attending college. The inclusion of four-year graduation rates in this year's report is meant to address some of these limitations and provide a more complete picture of degree completion.

Recent changes in the rules regarding maintenance, collection, and reporting of federal data on race and ethnicity should be considered when interpreting data in this indicator. Institutions must now collect these data using a two-question format, in which the first assesses whether the individual is Hispanic/Latino (ethnicity), and the second evaluates whether the respondent is one or more of the following races: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or white. In addition, Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander was separated into two categories and a reporting category "two or more races" was introduced.

In the most recent graduation survey, institutions had the option to report under old or new race/ethnicity categories. IPEDS then derived a total, where the new category overlapped with the old. The data contained in this indicator reflect these derived categories. It is possible that the addition of “two or more races” in the new system changed how institutions reported students, which raises questions about the ability to compare estimates from the 2008 survey to those from previous or future years (when institutions will have fully transitioned to the new system).

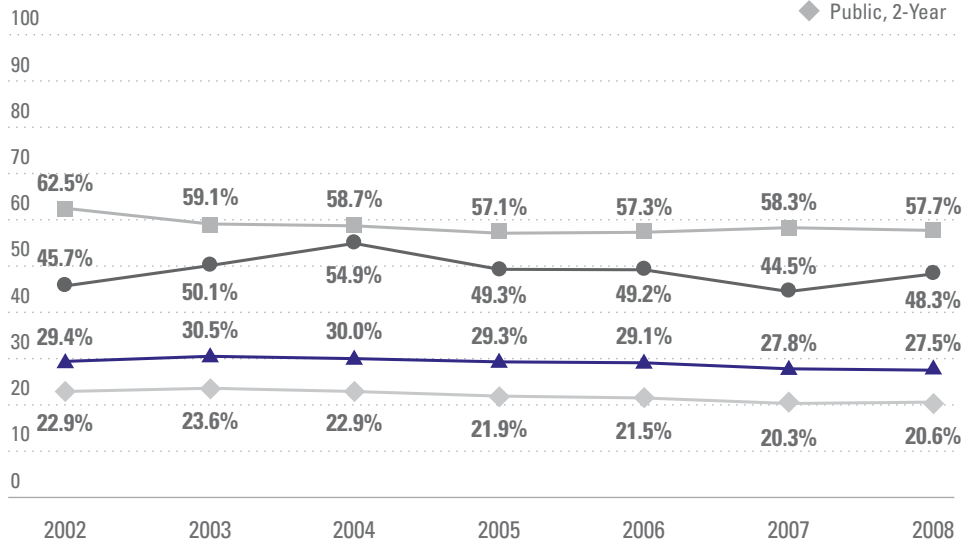
Finally, some estimates are based on a very small number of students, particularly when disaggregated by state by sector by ethnicity. Readers are advised to consider the number of institutions behind various estimates as well as the number of students who underlie these estimates. In some cases, institutional responses are altered by NCES to protect the privacy of students. Thus, the publicly available survey data may not reflect the exact value reported by institutions. The impact of this likely varies across figures within this indicator. For example, there is likely a greater impact on American Indian or Alaska Native estimates than there is for white students, since a greater number of institutional responses regarding American Indian or Alaska Natives may have been altered by NCES. Similarly, estimates based on the cumulative responses of many small colleges may be impacted more than those based on the cumulative responses of larger colleges.

9.2a

National Three-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges, 2002–2008

Updated data source

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2002–2008

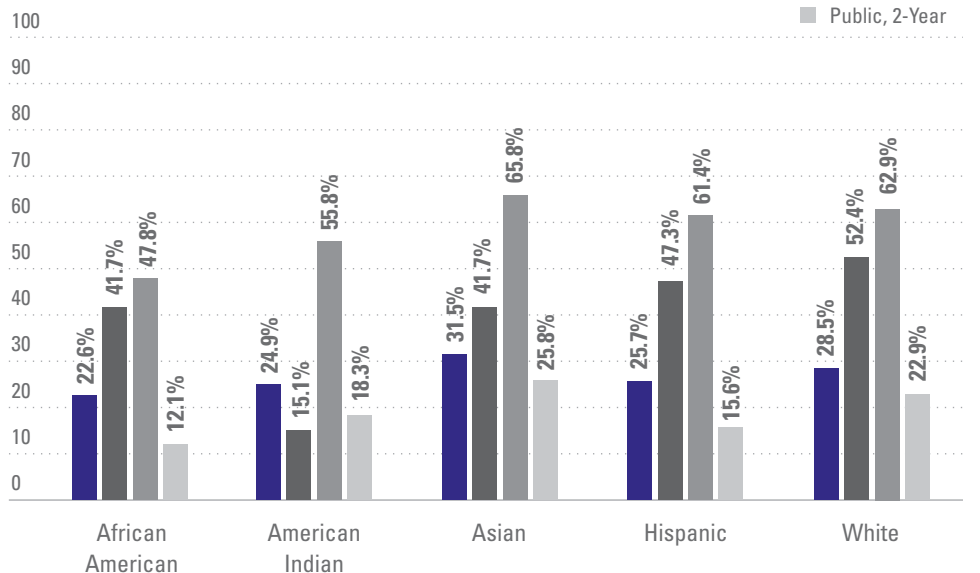


9.2b

National Three-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by Race/Ethnicity, 2008

Updated data source

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



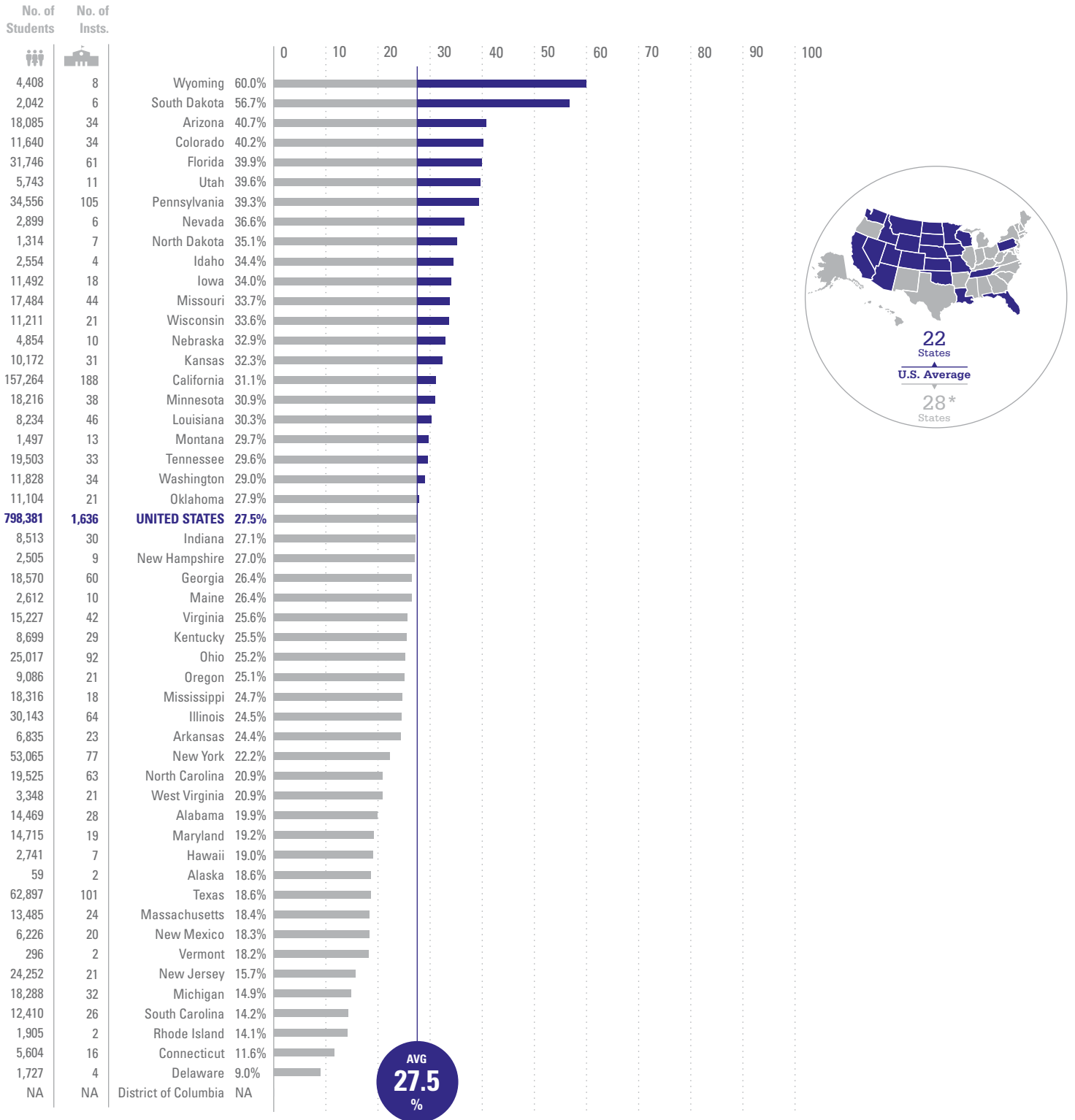
9.2c

Three-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



* Indicator data not available for all states.

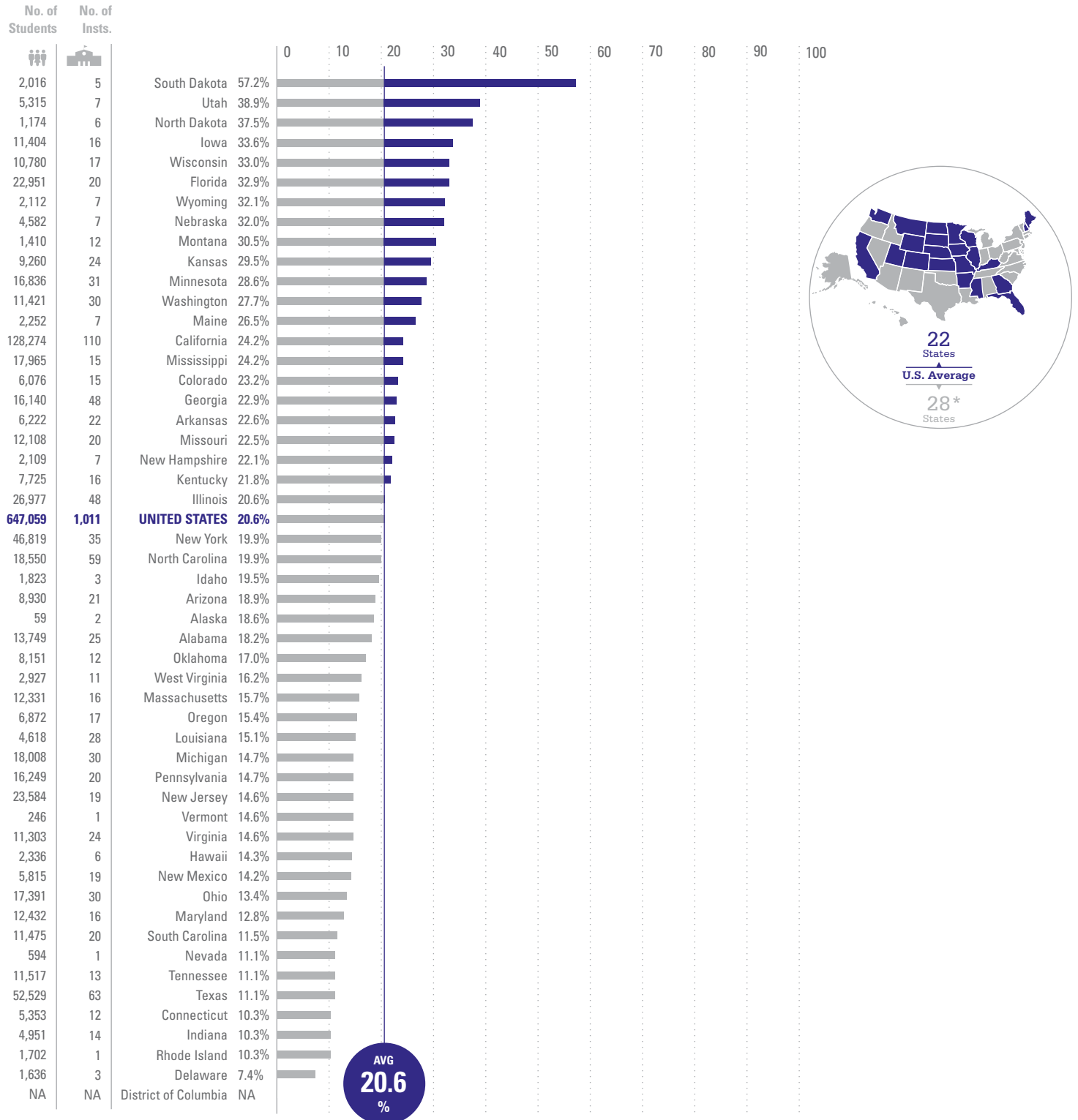
9.2d

Three-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Public Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



* Indicator data not available for all states.

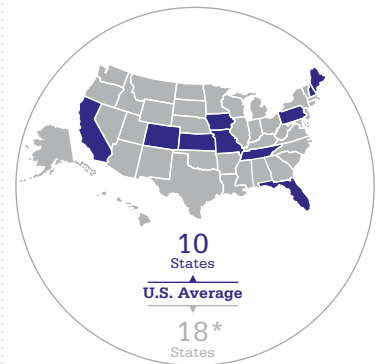
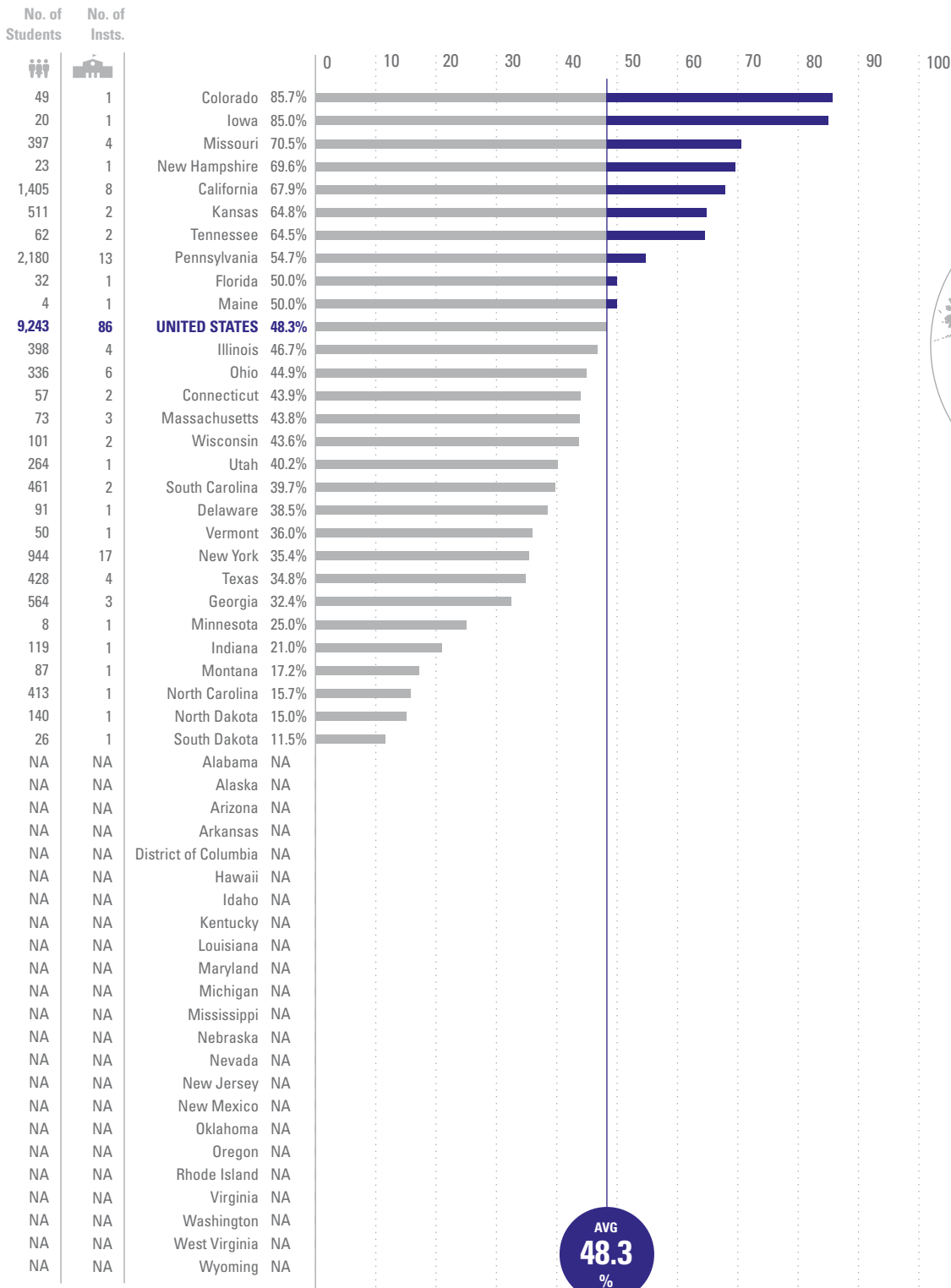
9.2e

Three-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Private Not-for-Profit Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
48.3
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

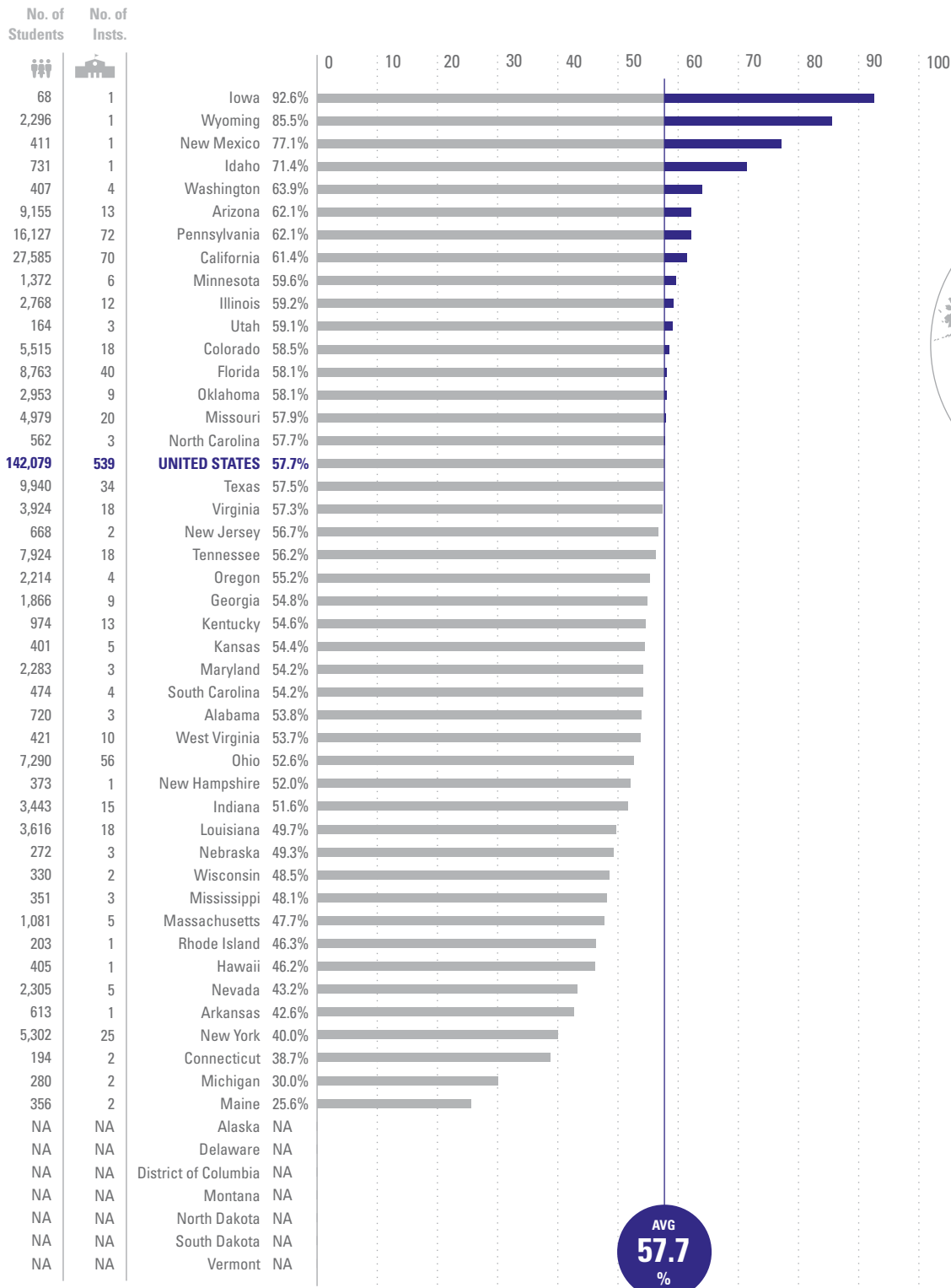
9.2f

Three-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Private For-Profit Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



* Indicator data not available for all states.

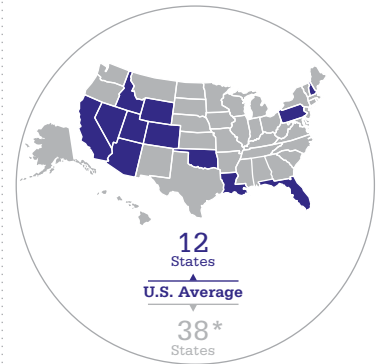
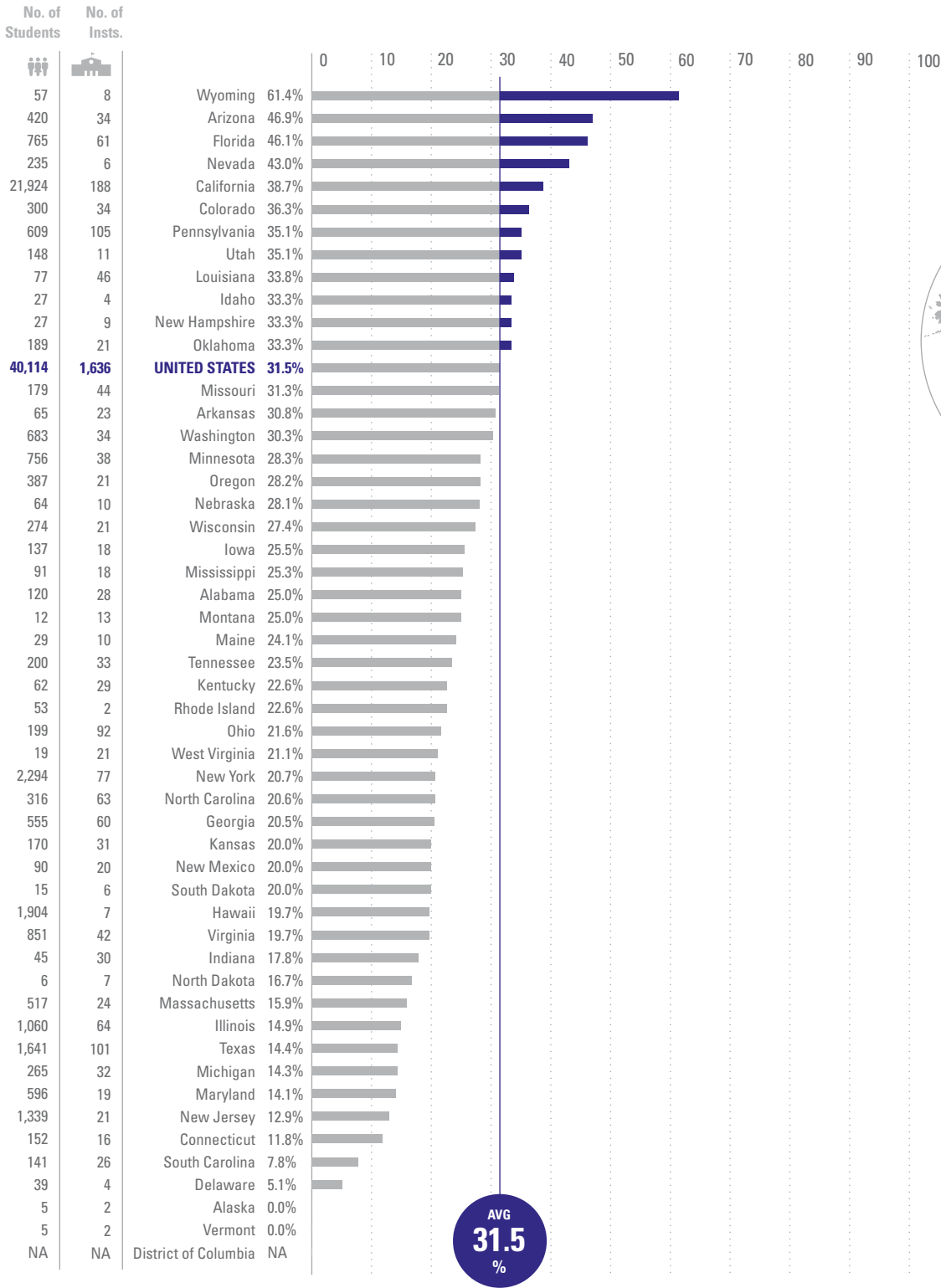
9.2g

Three-Year Graduation Rates of Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
31.5
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

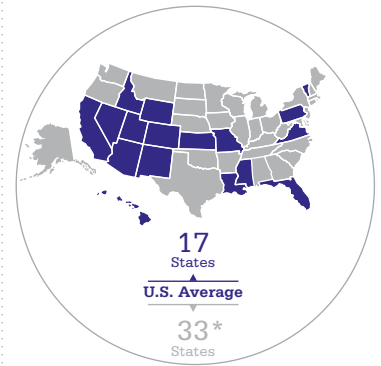
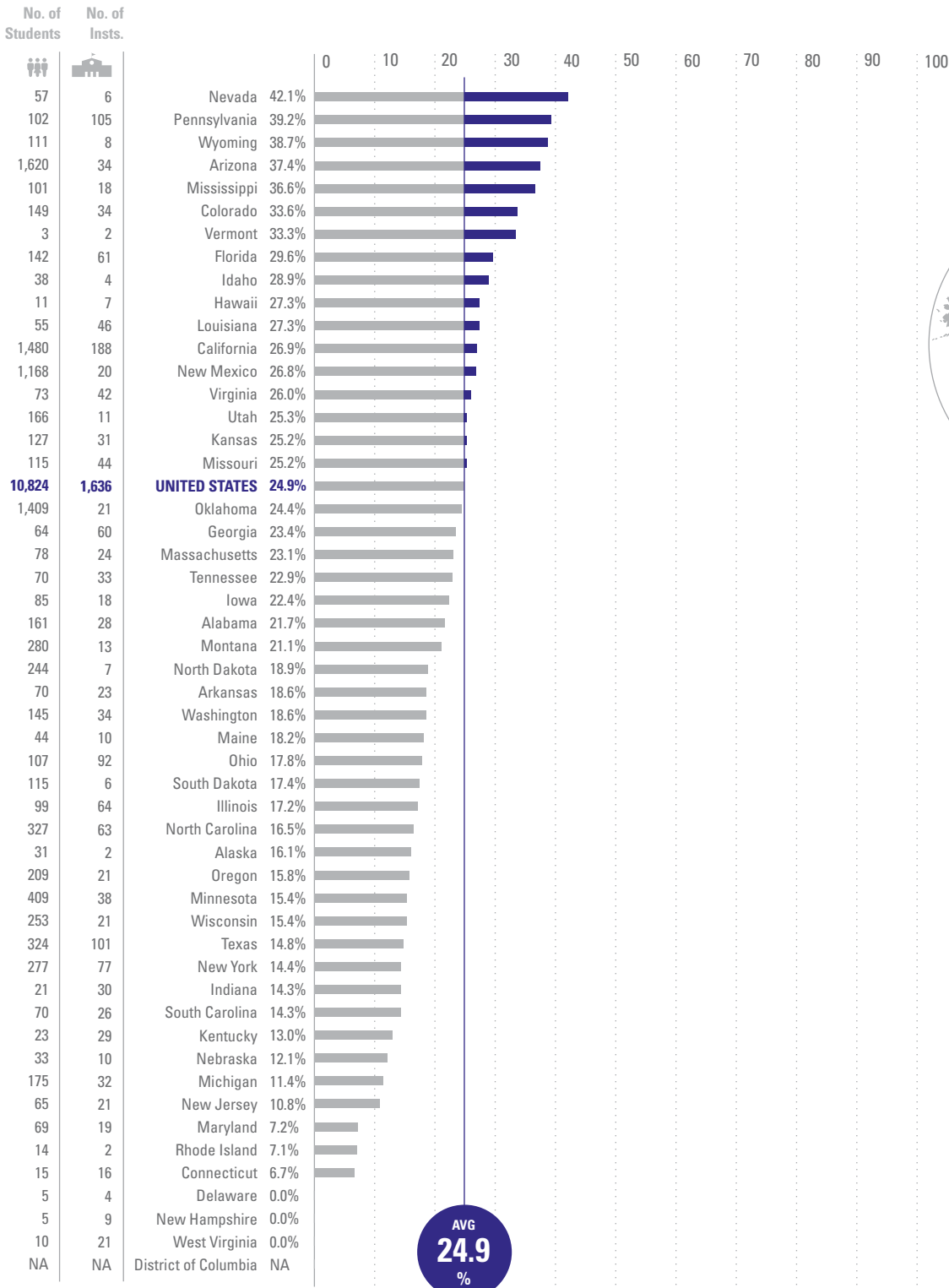
9.2h

Three-Year Graduation Rates of American Indian or Alaska Native Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
24.9
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

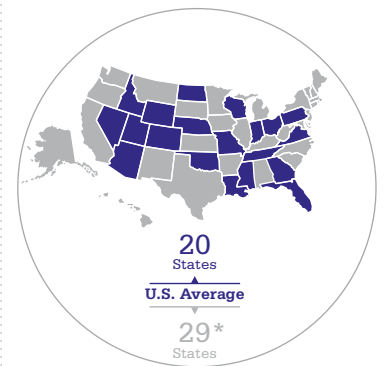
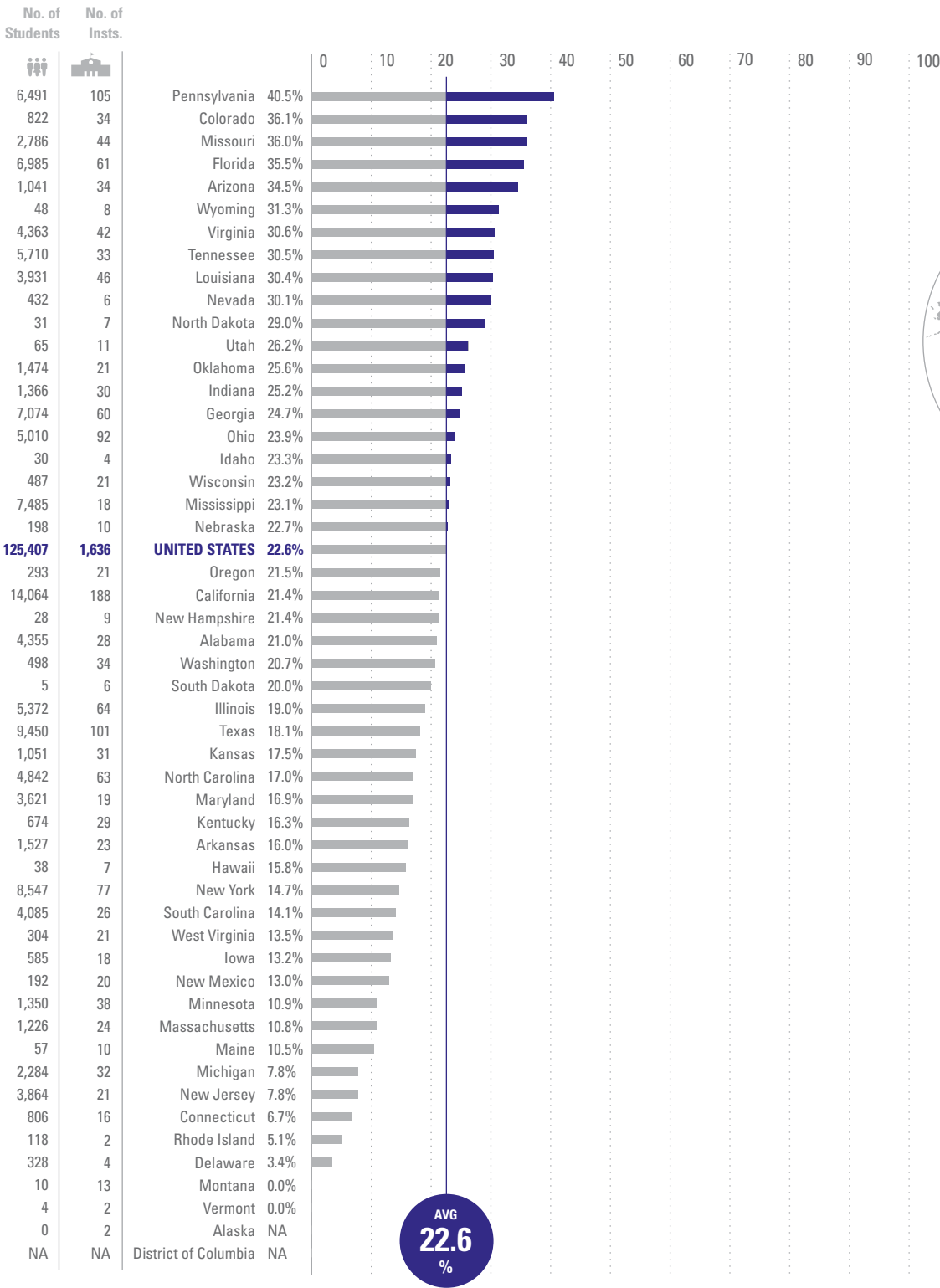
9.2i

Three-Year Graduation Rates of African American Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
22.6
%

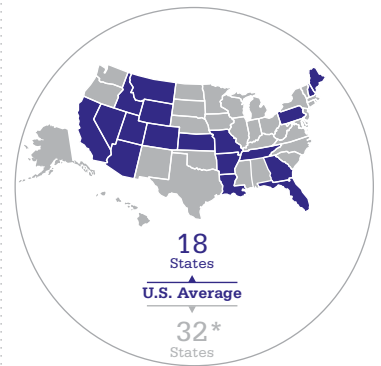
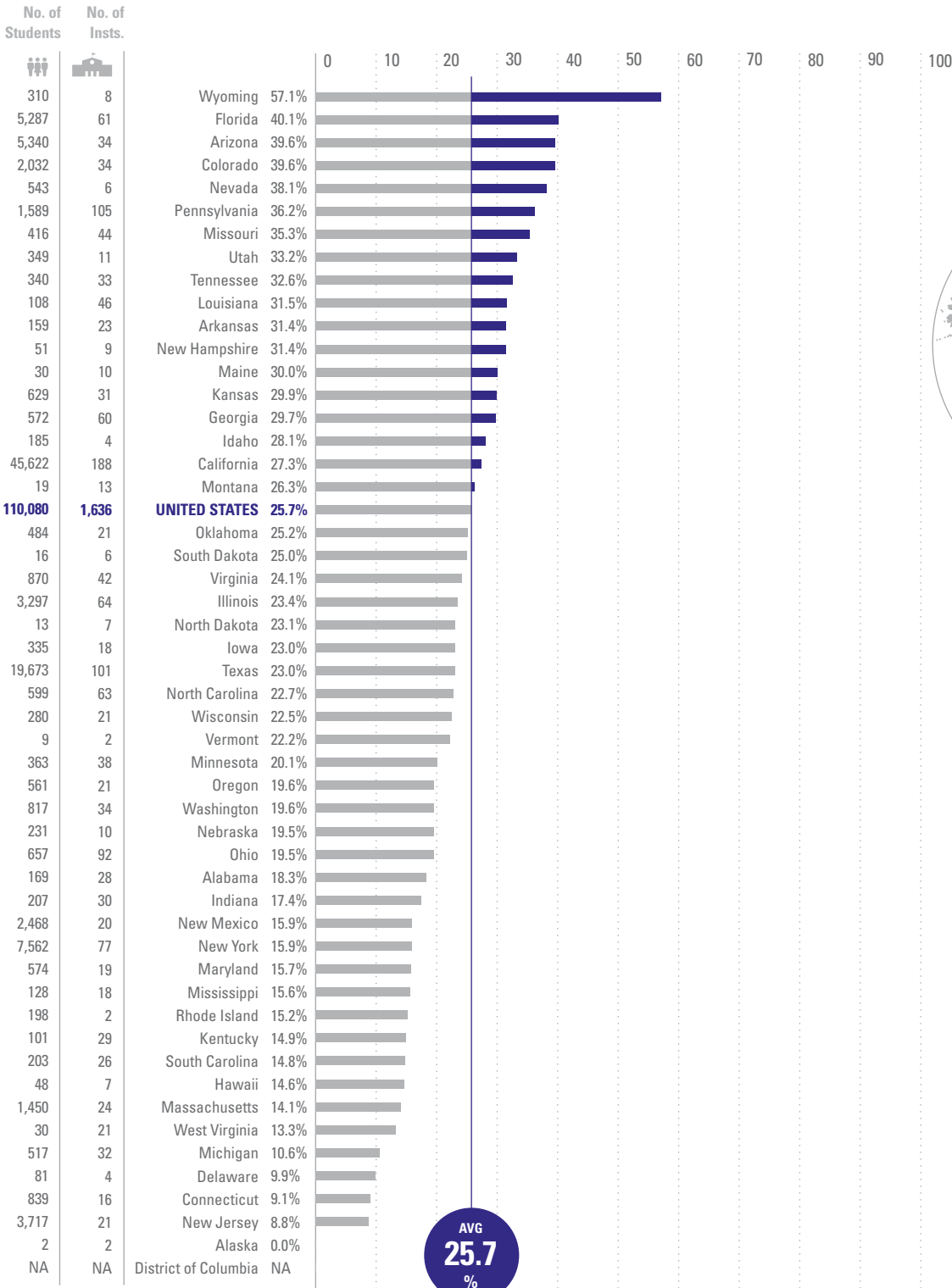
* Indicator data not available for all states.

9.2j

Three-Year Graduation Rates of Hispanic Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source 

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
25.7
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

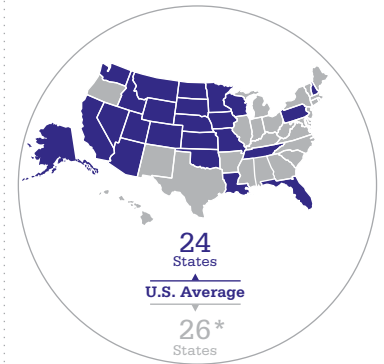
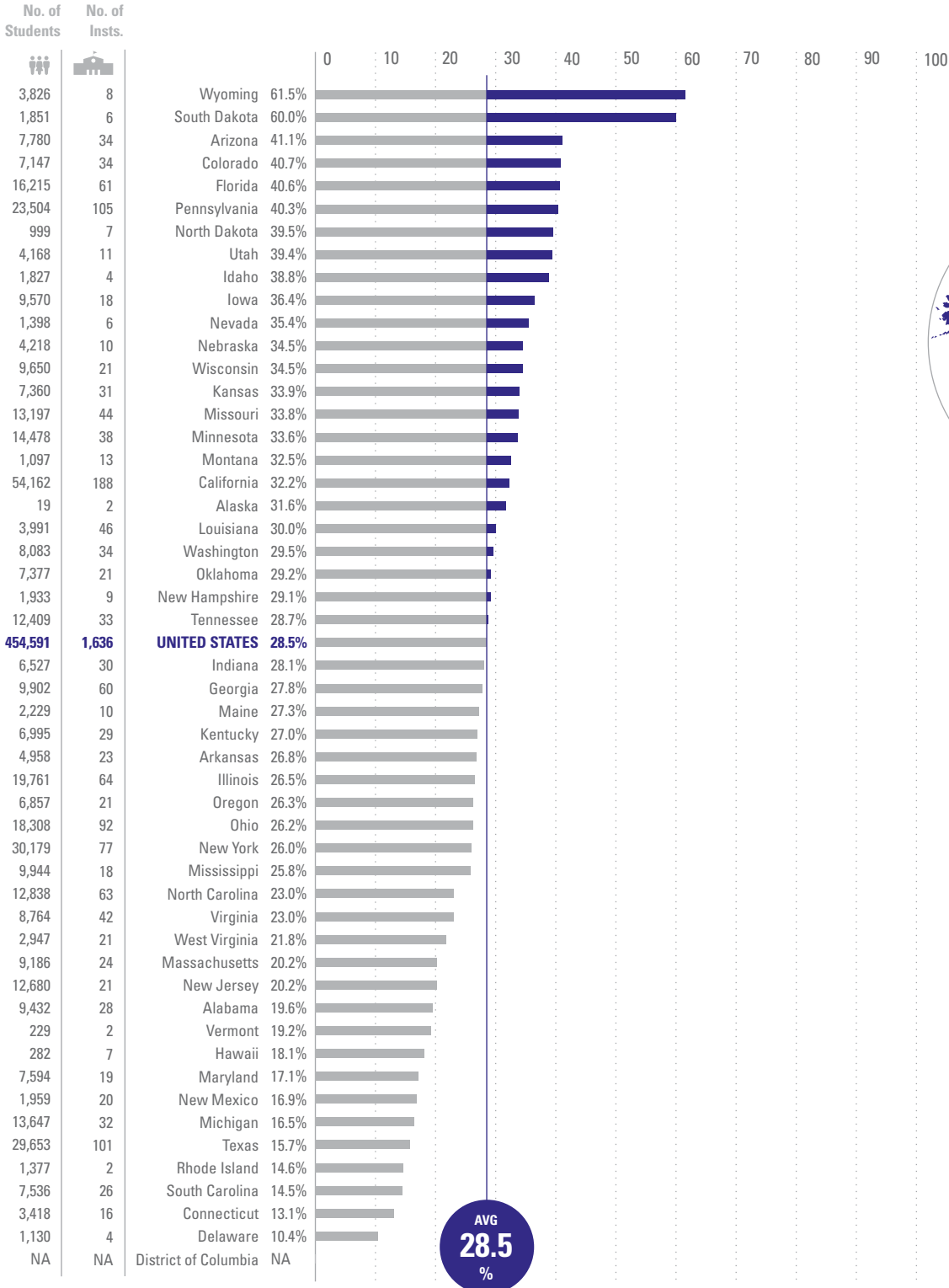
9.2k

Three-Year Graduation Rates of White Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
28.5
%

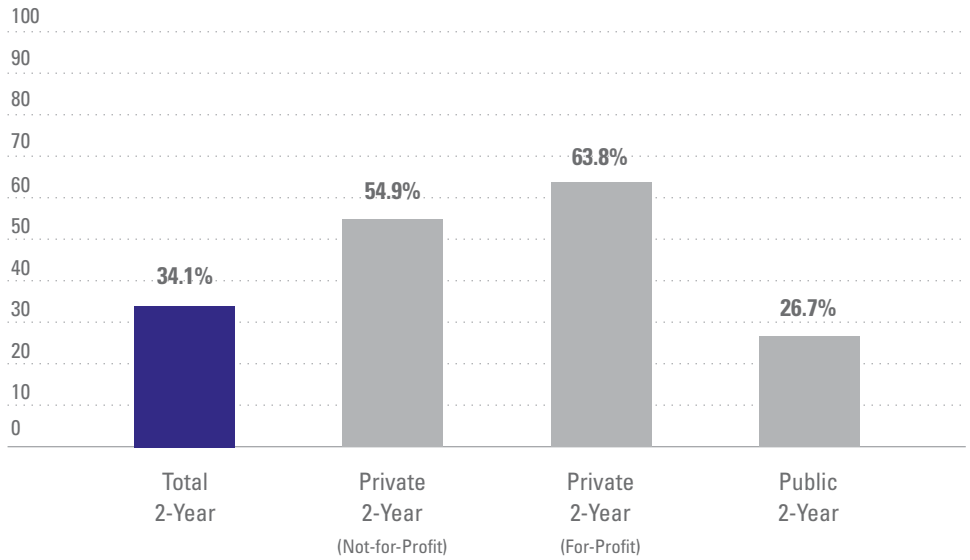
* Indicator data not available for all states.

9.21

National Four-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



* Includes both for-profit and not-for-profit institutions.

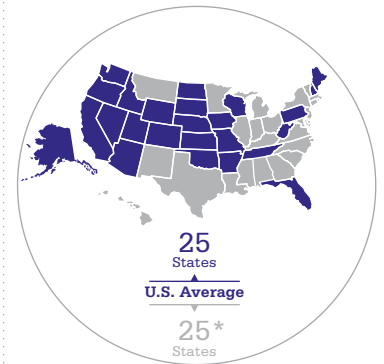
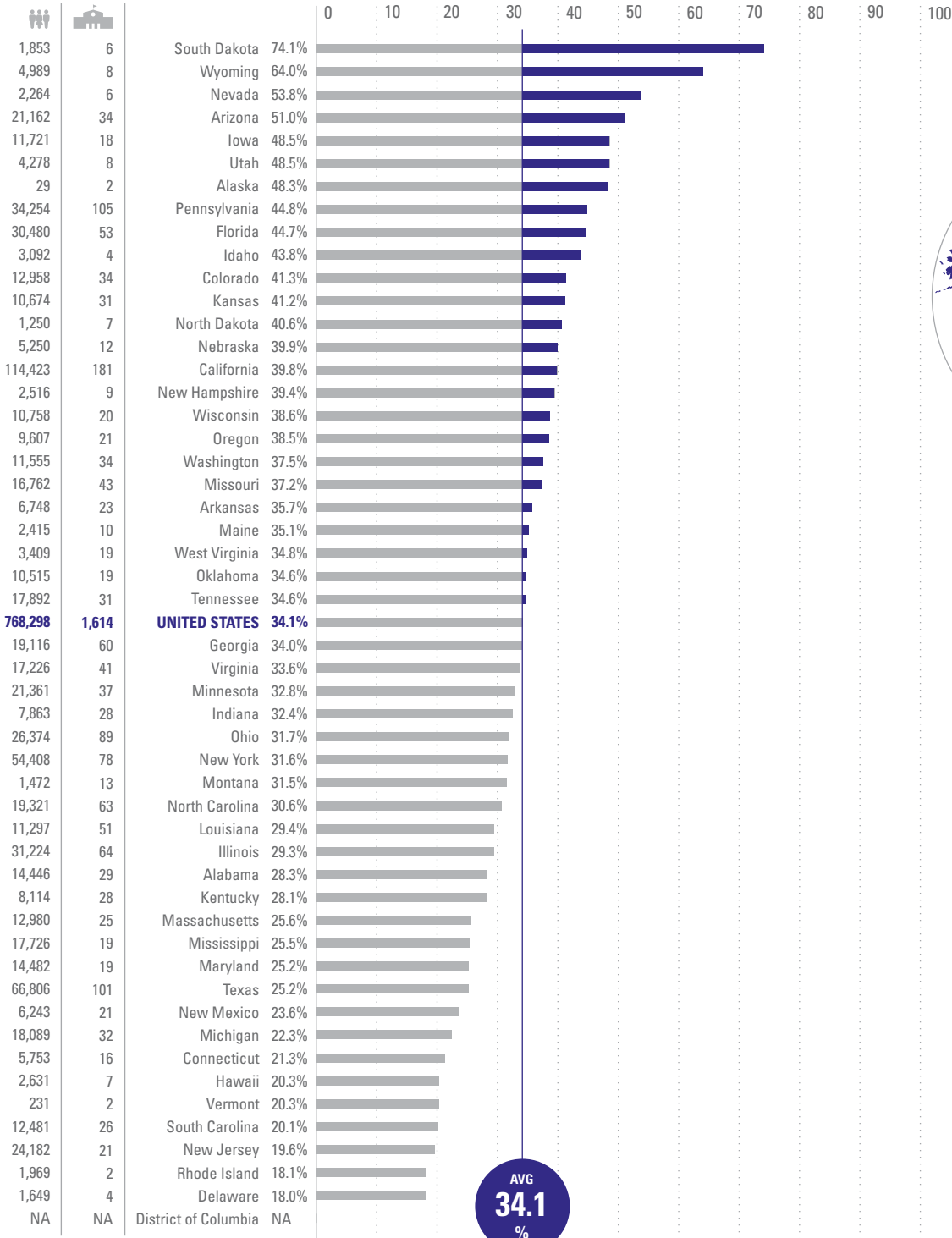
9.2m

Four-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008

No. of Students No. of Insts.



AVG
34.1
%

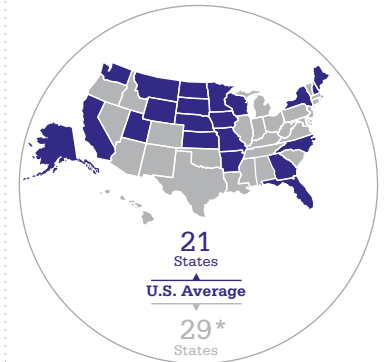
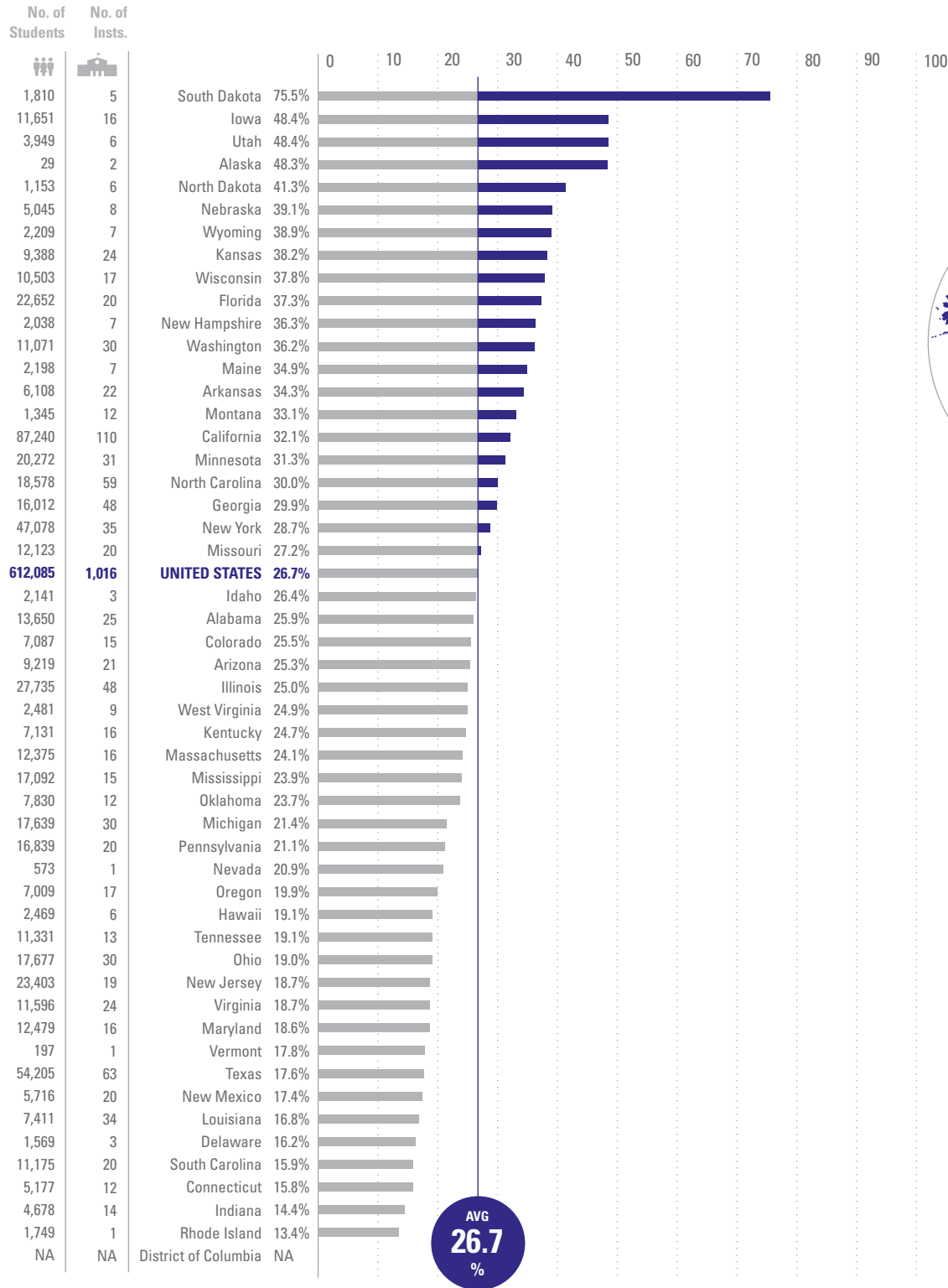
* Indicator data not available for all states.

9.2n

Four-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Public Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
26.7
%

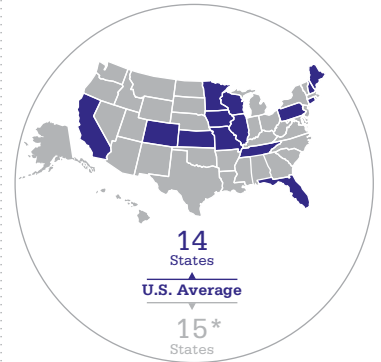
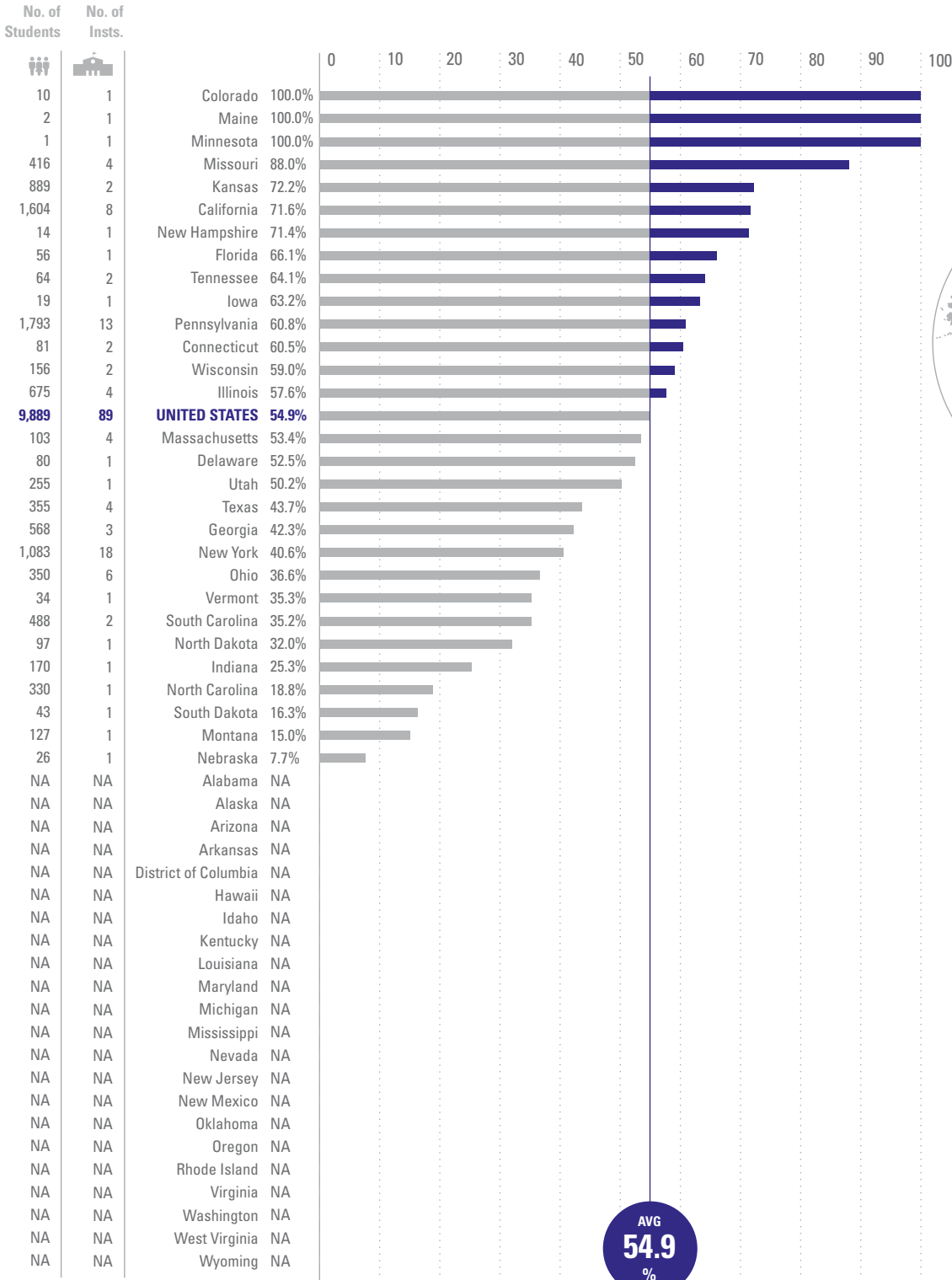
* Indicator data not available for all states.

9.2o

Four-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Private Not-for-Profit Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
54.9
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

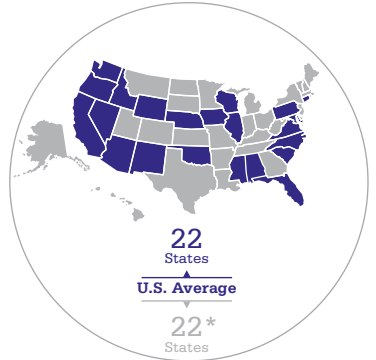
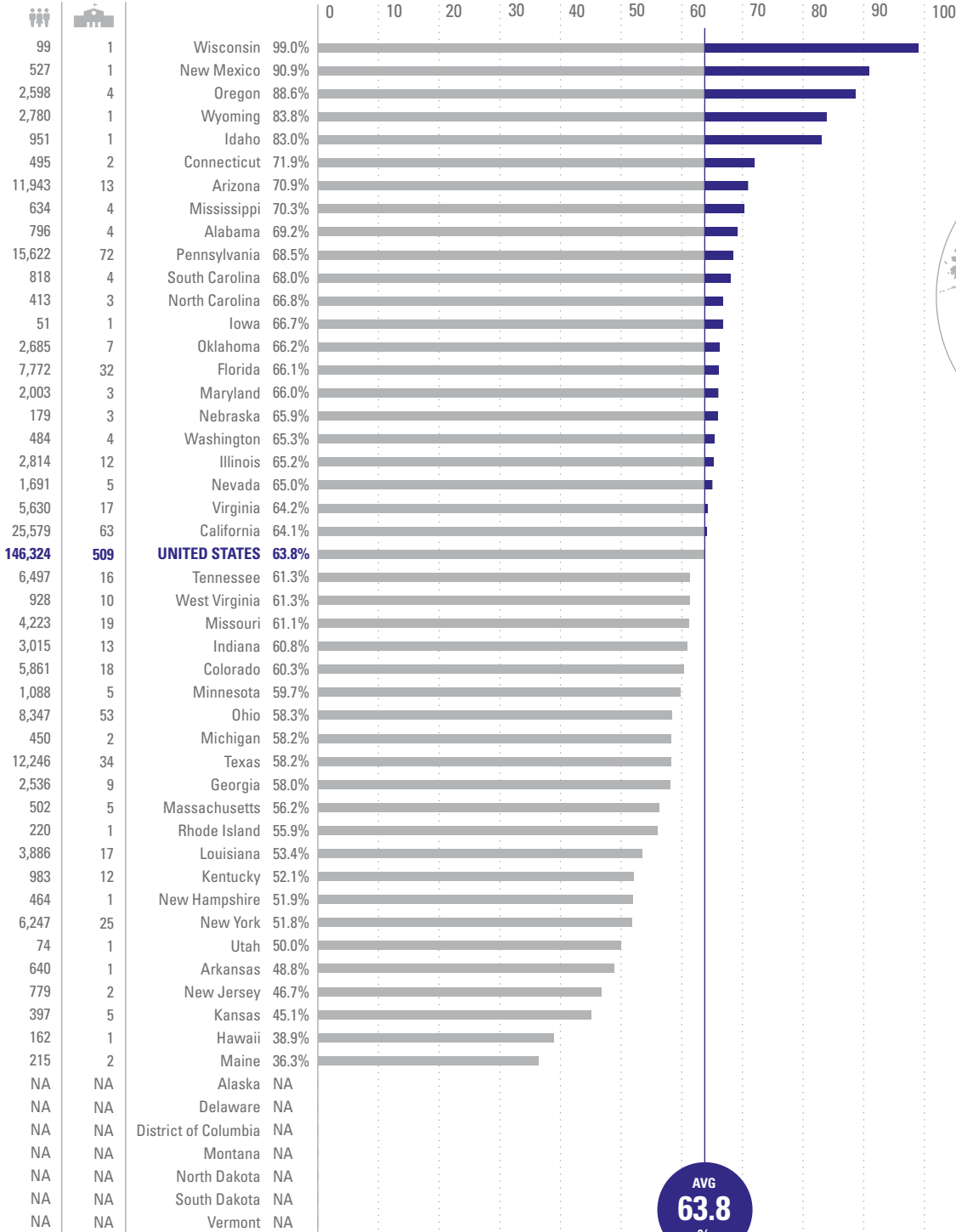
9.2p

Four-Year Graduation Rates of Degree- and Certificate-Seeking Students at Private For-Profit Two-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008

No. of Students No. of Insts.



AVG
63.8
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

57.7%

As of 2008, 57.7 percent of full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.

◀▶ 2007–2008

38.5%

As of 2008, 38.5 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.

◀▶ 2007–2008

Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students

What is this measure, and why is this measure important? This measure provides a more complete picture of the educational progress of American college students. The majority of data in this indicator reflect the proportion of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who graduate within 150 percent of normal program length (i.e., six years). In addition, eight-year graduation rates (200 percent of normal program length) are available for the first time and are included in this indicator. Graduation rates are calculated by aggregating, across institutions in a given state and/or sector, the institution-level adjusted entering cohorts and the number of students from these cohorts who graduate within the appropriate time frame. Estimates therefore can be interpreted as a percentage of students in the given sector and/or state.

Traditional graduation rates reflect persistence and degree attainment within the institution in which one originally enrolls. One criticism of this approach is that this does not account for transfer students who go on to earn a degree from an institution other than the one first attended. Recent data from the Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) longitudinal study are included in this indicator in order to address this limitation.

The data are disaggregated by state, race/ethnicity and source of institutional control (i.e., public, private not-for-profit, private for-profit) to help states understand the differential outcomes across groups and to illustrate how the state's overall graduation rate is a function of the varying performance of these students in different types of institutions.

What are the policy issues associated with this measure? National and state policymakers are highly attuned to the graduation rate discussion. Individuals, as well as states, invest money in higher education with the expectation of degree completion — a credential that can improve the economic well-being of both the student and the state as a whole. The consequences of failing to complete a degree are of great concern, especially when one considers the growth in average student loan debt and student loan default rates in recent years (see Recommendation Seven for more details).

Graduation rates have been a part of the higher education landscape since Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know Act in 1990. They are the primary national, standardized measure of postsecondary outcomes. However, policymakers should consider the significance and meaning of high or low graduation rates. The appropriate context should be taken into account when considering whether persistence indicators such as graduation rates can or should be used as accountability measures. Institutions vary in their mission as well as the composition of entering students, factors which should be recognized when interpreting estimates, particularly at the institution level. Institutions that aim to educate low-income, first-generation, traditionally

40.5%

As of 2008, 40.5 percent of African American full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.

◀▶ 2007–2008

49.4%

As of 2008, 49.4 percent of Hispanic full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in six years or less.

▲ 2.6ppts 2007–2008

underserved students will face substantially different enrollment, retention and graduation challenges compared to institutions that attract most of their students from the top of the nation's high school graduating classes. Policymakers should seek to understand the benefits and limitations of graduation rates in order to better serve all constituents.

As discussed in the previous indicator, substantial persistent gaps exist between the graduation rates of Asian and white students and the graduation rates of students in other racial/ethnic groups. There is a tremendous amount of research being done to understand the factors that contribute to these differential outcomes. A complete discussion of this research is beyond the scope of this publication.

Where are we now? As of 2008, 57.7 percent of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students in the nation's four-year colleges graduate within six years (Figure 9.3a). This estimate increased slightly from a low of 55.5 percent in 2002. Graduation rates vary by sector, such that 55.3 percent of bachelor's degree-seeking students in public four-year colleges graduate within six years, compared to 65.1 percent and 23.5 percent at private not-for-profit and for-profit four-year colleges, respectively. Public institutions account for just under two-thirds of first-time, full-time students at four-year colleges. Private not-for-profit institutions constitute approximately one-third of enrollment, while private for-profit institutions reflect only 2 to 3 percent of four-year college freshmen enrollment.

Six-year graduation rates of first-time, full-time students at four-year colleges vary by race/ethnicity and sector (Figure 9.3b). Asian students at four-year colleges have the highest six-year graduation rate (67.5 percent), followed by white students (60.7 percent), Hispanic students (49.4 percent), African American students (40.5 percent) and American Indian students (38.5 percent). Six-year graduation rates are highest in the private not-for-profit sector, a finding which is consistent across racial/ethnic groups.

Similar findings emerge from the Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) longitudinal survey data (Figure 9.3c), such that just over half (50.5 percent) of students who enter a four-year college graduate within six years. Graduation rates are substantially higher among public and private not-for-profit institutions compared to private for-profit colleges. BPS data also provide insight into the impact of transferring across institutions. Six-year graduation rates are somewhat higher when taking into account whether the student graduates from any institution (58.0 percent), as opposed to just looking at the original institution (50.5 percent) in which the student is enrolled (Figure 9.3c).

When disaggregated by state, the six-year graduation rate at four-year colleges ranges from 25.5 percent in Alaska to 73.2 percent in the District of Columbia (Figure 9.3d). States such as Connecticut, District of Columbia, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah and Vermont are impacted largely, and positively, by the private

60.6%

As of 2008, 60.6 percent of full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year colleges graduate in eight years or less.

not-for-profit sector (Figure 9.3f). Private for-profit institutions account for over four of every 10 first-time, full-time students in Arizona, thus the overall six-year graduation rate in this state is influenced greatly by this sector (Figure 9.3g). Graduation rates also vary by race/ethnicity and sector (Figures 9.3h–9.3l).

When six-year graduation rates are compared against eight-year graduation rates, it is clear that the additional time affords a number of students the opportunity to complete their degrees. For example, while 57.7 percent of first-time, full-time degree-seeking students who entered in fall 2000 earn a bachelor's degree in six years (Figure 9.3a), 60.6 percent of this same cohort graduate within eight years (Figure 9.3m). When disaggregated by state, the eight-year graduation rate ranges from 30.6 percent in Alaska to 75.4 percent in the District of Columbia (Figure 9.3n).

When interpreting this measure, what should be kept in mind?

The limitations of these graduation rates deserve consideration. For example, as was the case with the previous indicator, graduation rates are based solely on degree completion within the institution in which one enrolls as a full-time, first-time student. In addition, they do not reflect part-time students, students who begin college in terms other than the fall term, or incoming transfer students who go on to successfully complete a degree. In fact, successful transfer students count against the original institution's graduation rate (which also influences estimates at the state level) and do nothing to benefit the receiving institution. Many policymakers and researchers have called for reforms to standardize the way that transfer rates are measured and reported by states and institutions. Because of the lack of the standardization of transfer rates, these data are not yet available to help contextualize the nation's success in increasing completion rates.

It is also important to consider that graduation rates are associated with many other factors not directly addressed in these data (e.g., first-generation status, academic preparation, socioeconomic background, adjustment to college, etc.). In addition, many students take longer than the traditional four- to six-year window to graduate, including students who begin as full-time students but spend most of their undergraduate experience attending part time and students who work while attending college. The inclusion of BPS estimates and eight-year graduation rates in this report is meant to address some of these limitations and provide a more complete picture of degree completion.

Recent changes in the rules regarding maintenance, collection, and reporting of federal data on race and ethnicity should be considered when interpreting data in this indicator. Institutions must now collect these data using a two-question format in which the first assesses whether the individual is Hispanic/Latino (ethnicity) and the second evaluates whether the respondent is one or more of the following races: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or white. In addition, Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander were separated into two categories and a reporting category "two or more races" was introduced.

In the most recent graduation survey, institutions had the option to report under old or new race/ethnicity categories. IPEDS then derived a total, where the new category overlapped with the old. The data contained in this indicator reflect these derived categories. It is possible that the addition of “two or more races” in the new system changes how institutions report students, which raises questions about the ability to compare estimates from the 2008 survey to those from previous or future years (when institutions will have fully transitioned to the new system).

Finally, some estimates are based on a very small number of students, particularly when disaggregated by state by sector by ethnicity. Readers are advised to consider the number of institutions behind various estimates as well as the number of students that underlie these estimates. In some cases, institutional responses are altered by NCEs to protect the privacy of students. Thus, the publicly available survey data may not reflect the exact value reported by institutions. The impact of this likely varies across figures within this indicator. For example, there is likely a greater impact on American Indian or Alaska Native estimates than there is for white students, since a greater number of institutional responses regarding American Indian or Alaska Natives may have been altered by NCEs. Similarly, estimates based on the cumulative responses of many small colleges may be impacted more than those based on the cumulative responses of larger colleges.

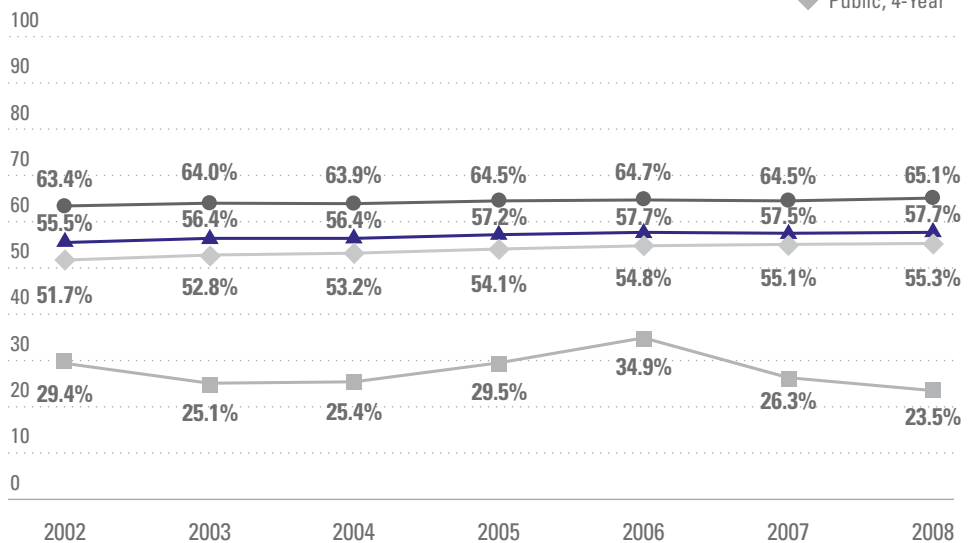
9.3a

National Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students, 2002–2008

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008


New figure +

- ▲ Total, 4-Year
- Private, 4-Year (Not-for-Profit)
- Private, 4-Year (For-Profit)
- ◆ Public, 4-Year

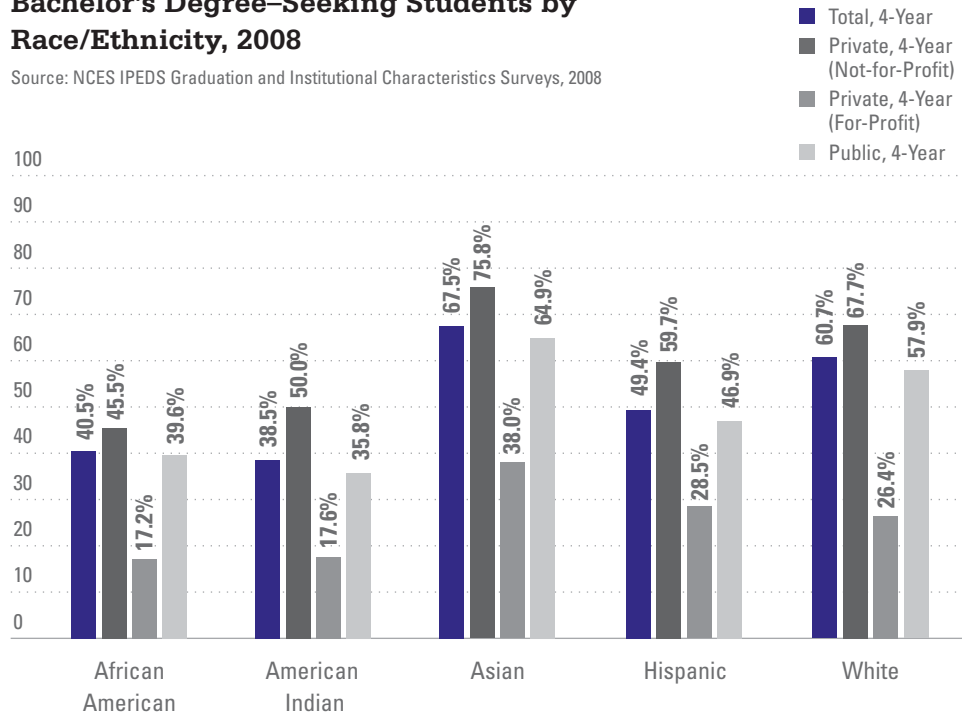


9.3b

National Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2008

Updated data source 

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008

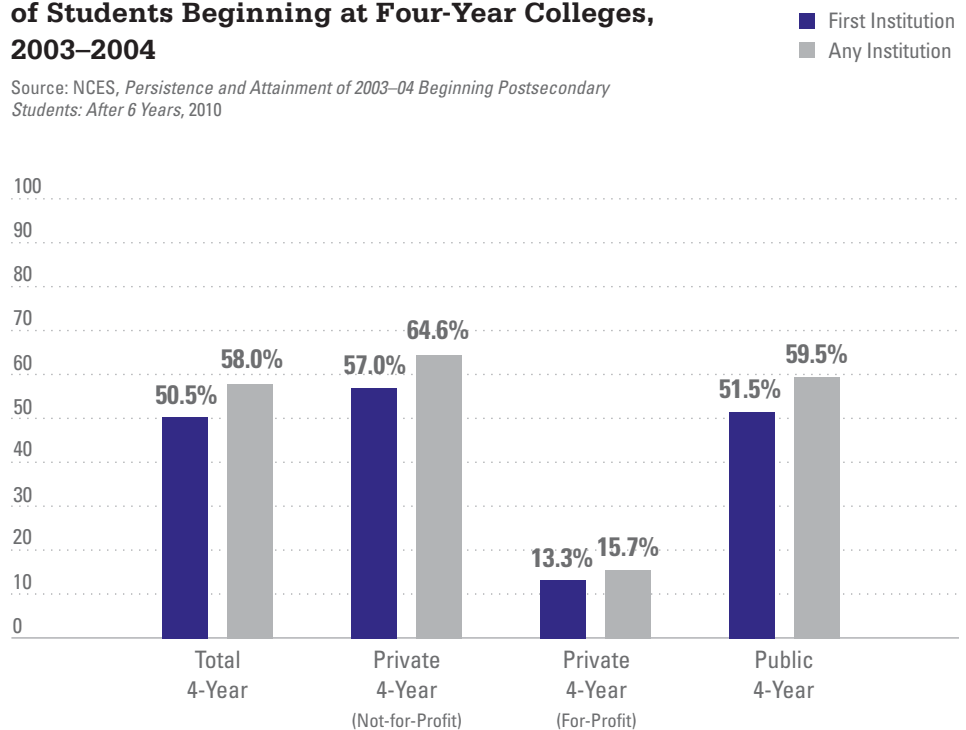


9.3c

Six-Year Bachelor's Degree Attainment Rates of Students Beginning at Four-Year Colleges, 2003-2004

New figure 

Source: NCES, *Persistence and Attainment of 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students: After 6 Years*, 2010



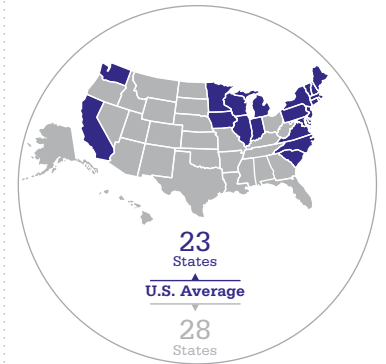
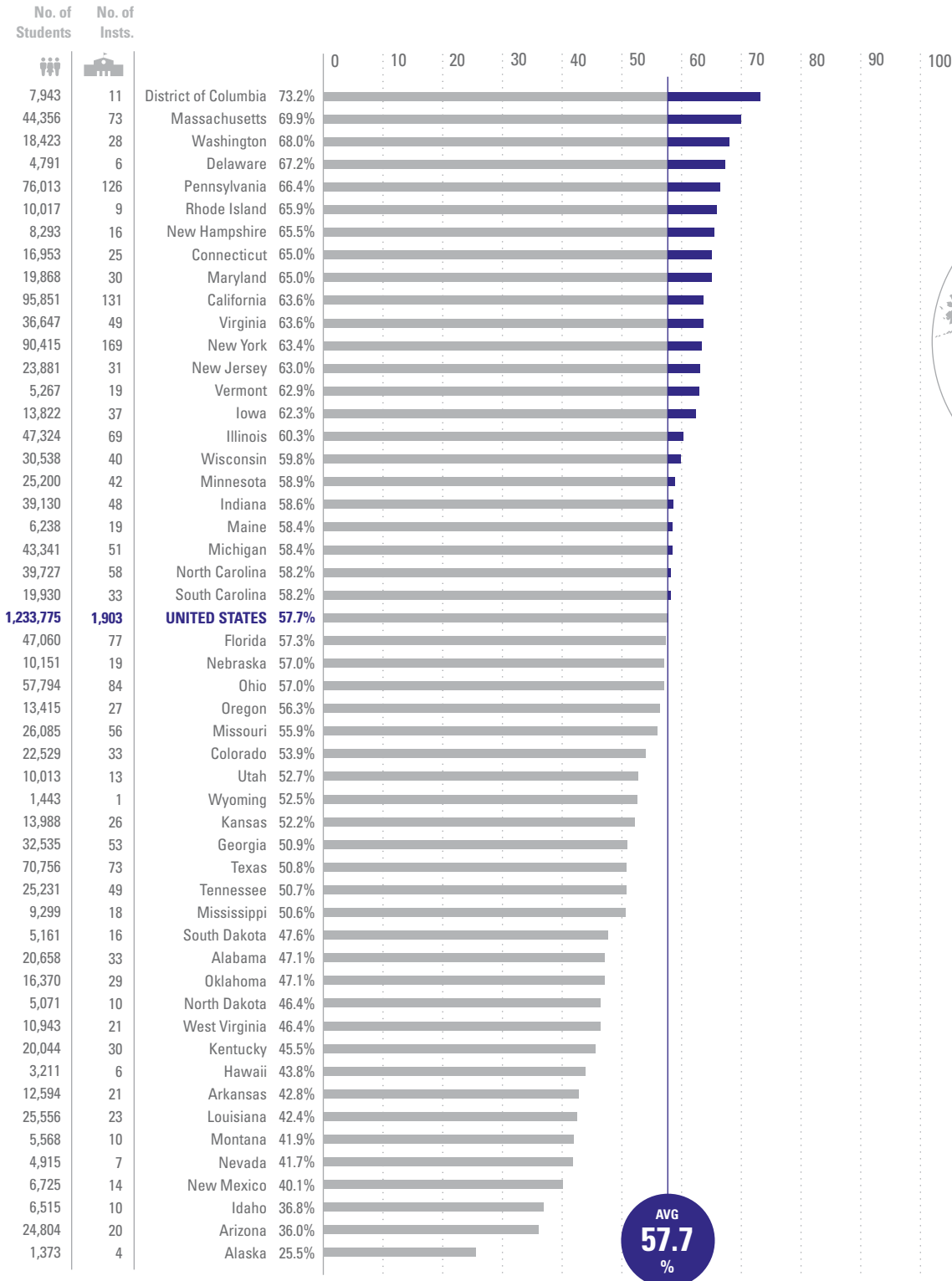
9.3d

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
57.7
%

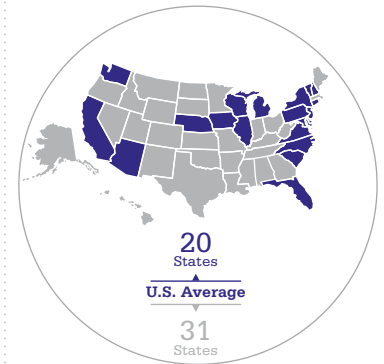
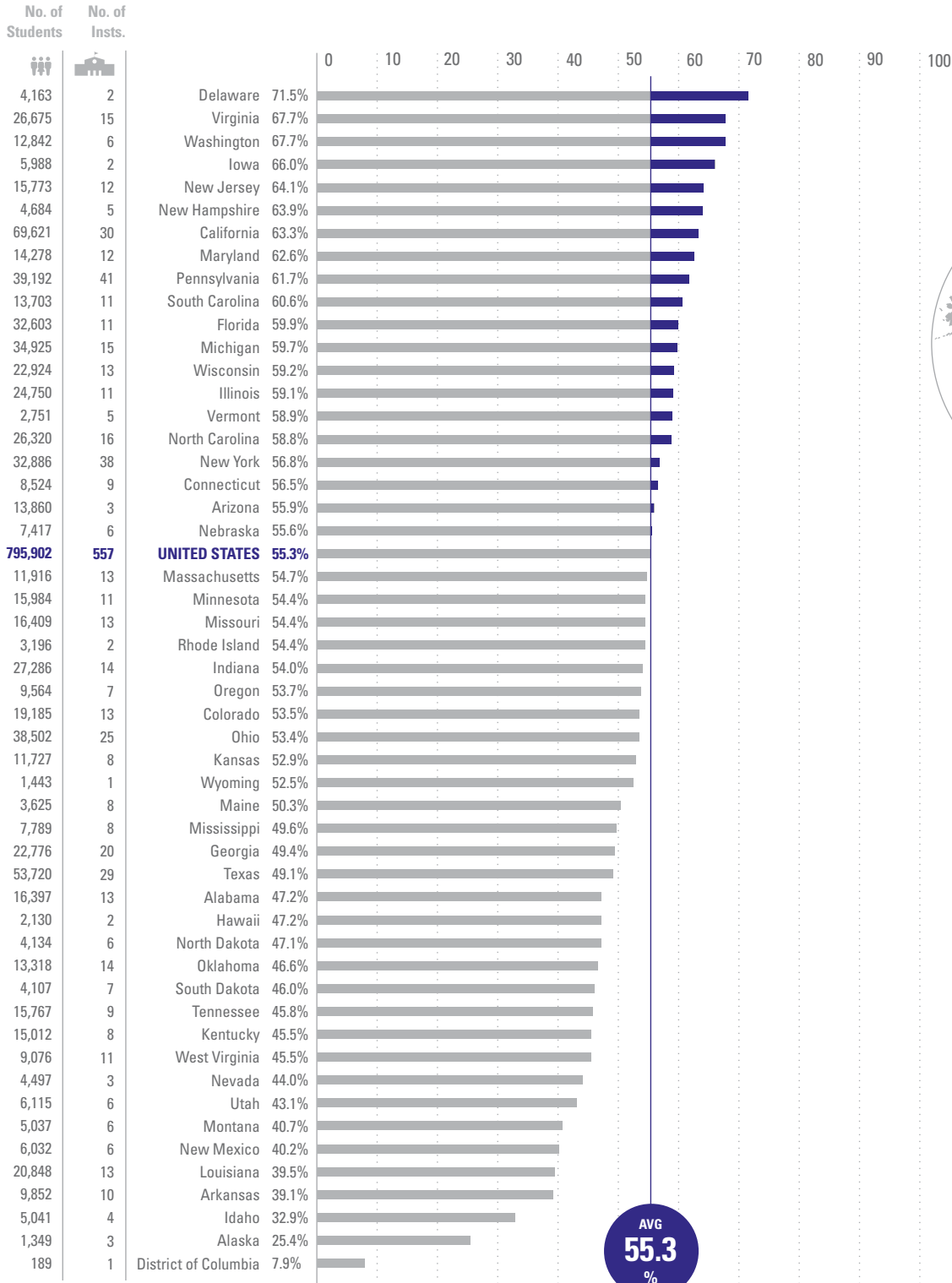
9.3e

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Public Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008

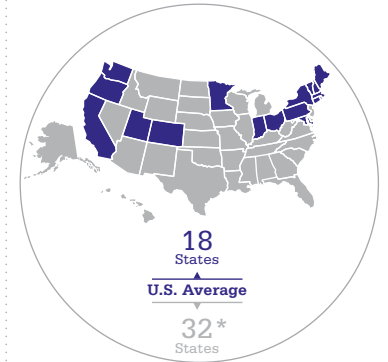
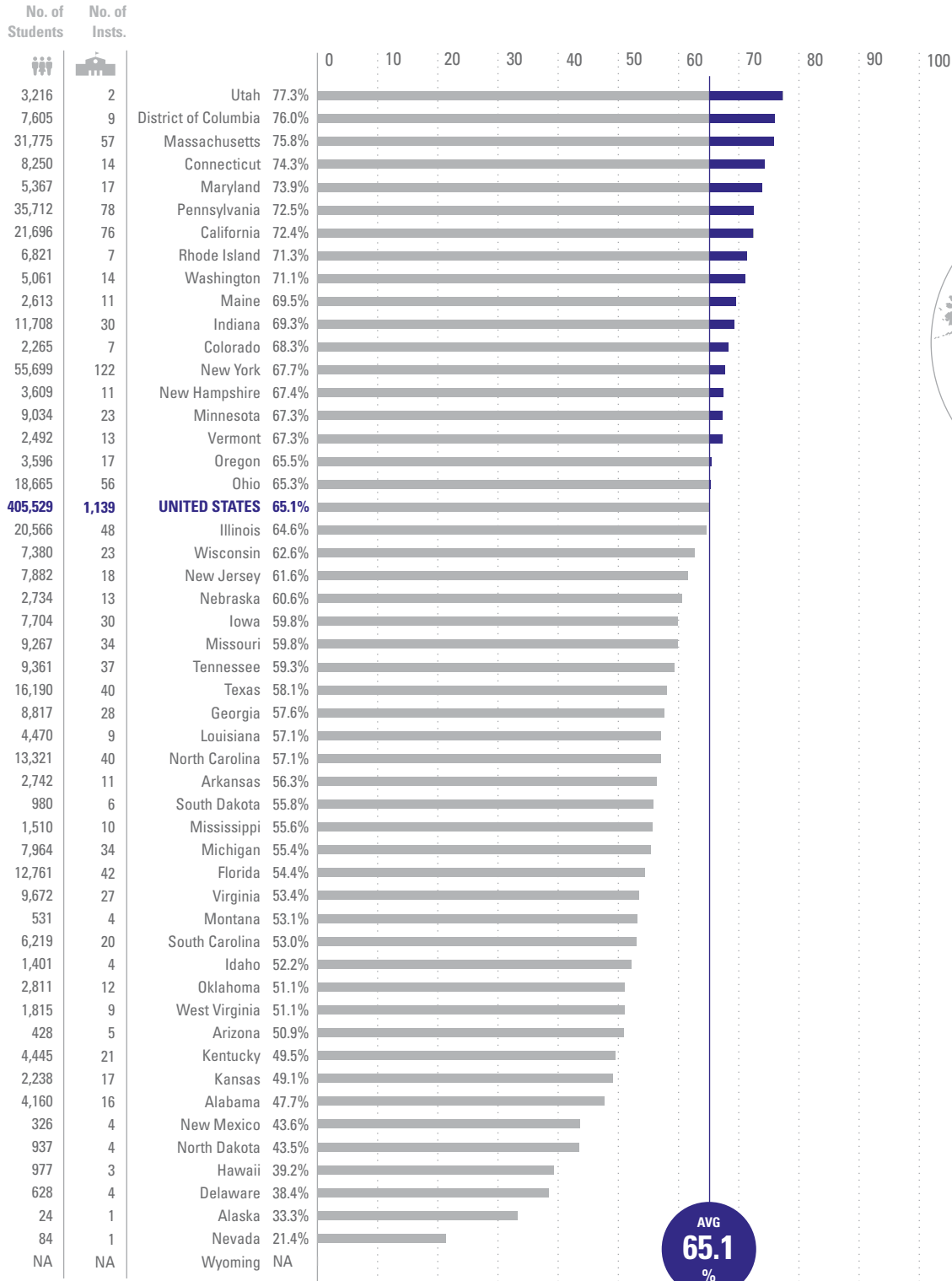


AVG
55.3
%

9.3f

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Private Not-for-Profit Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



* Indicator data not available for all states.

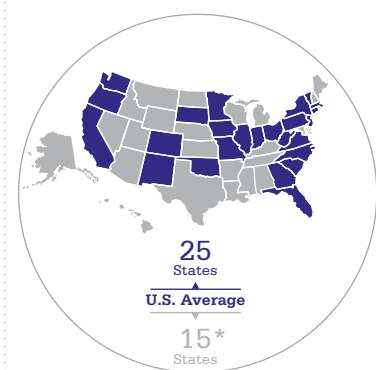
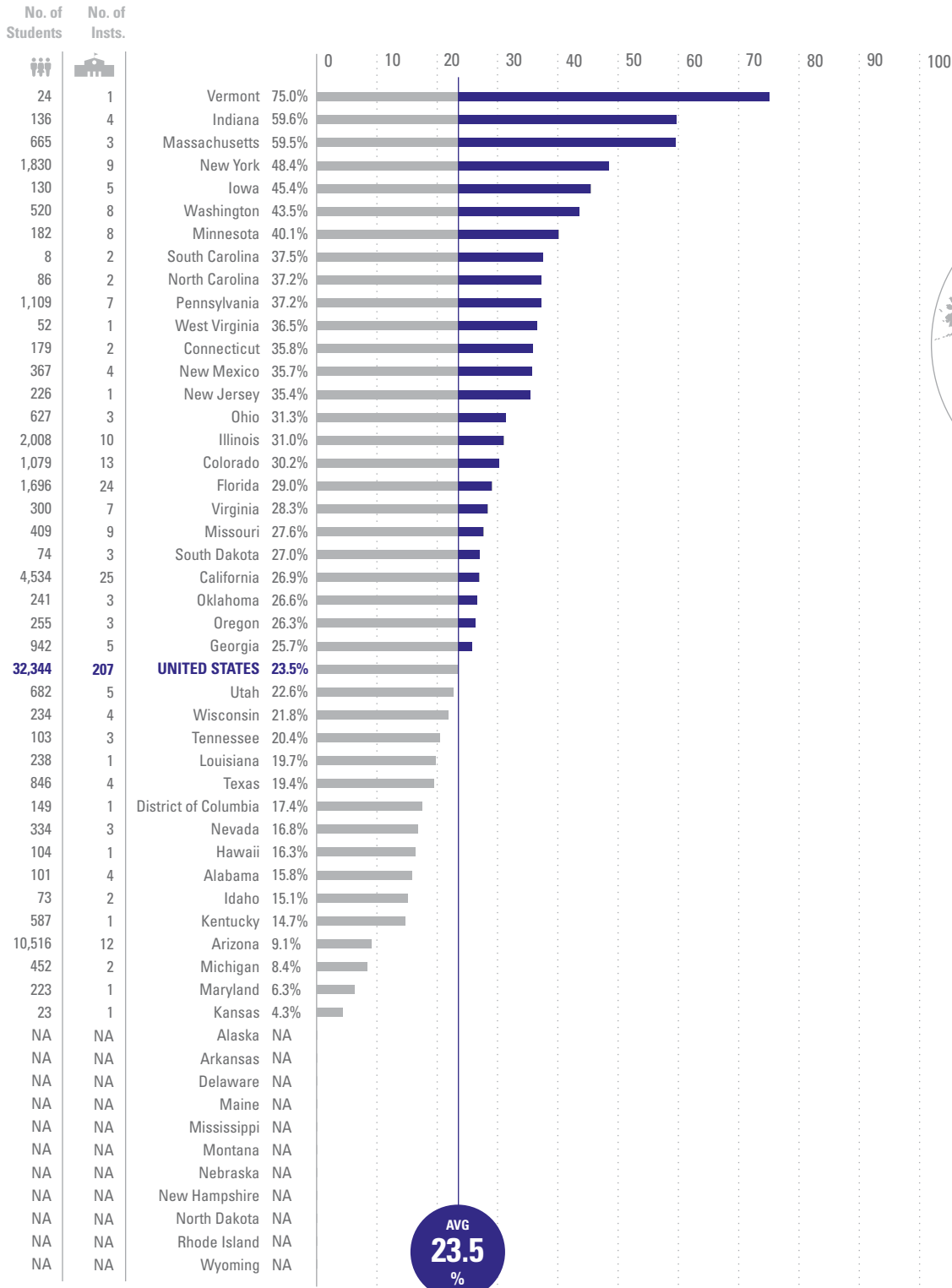
9.3g

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Private For-Profit Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
23.5
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

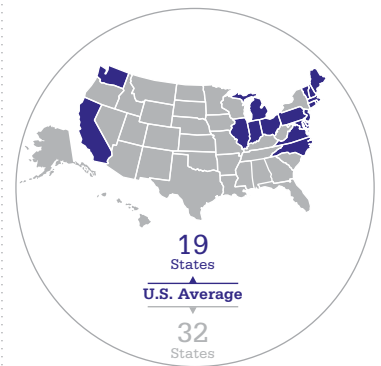
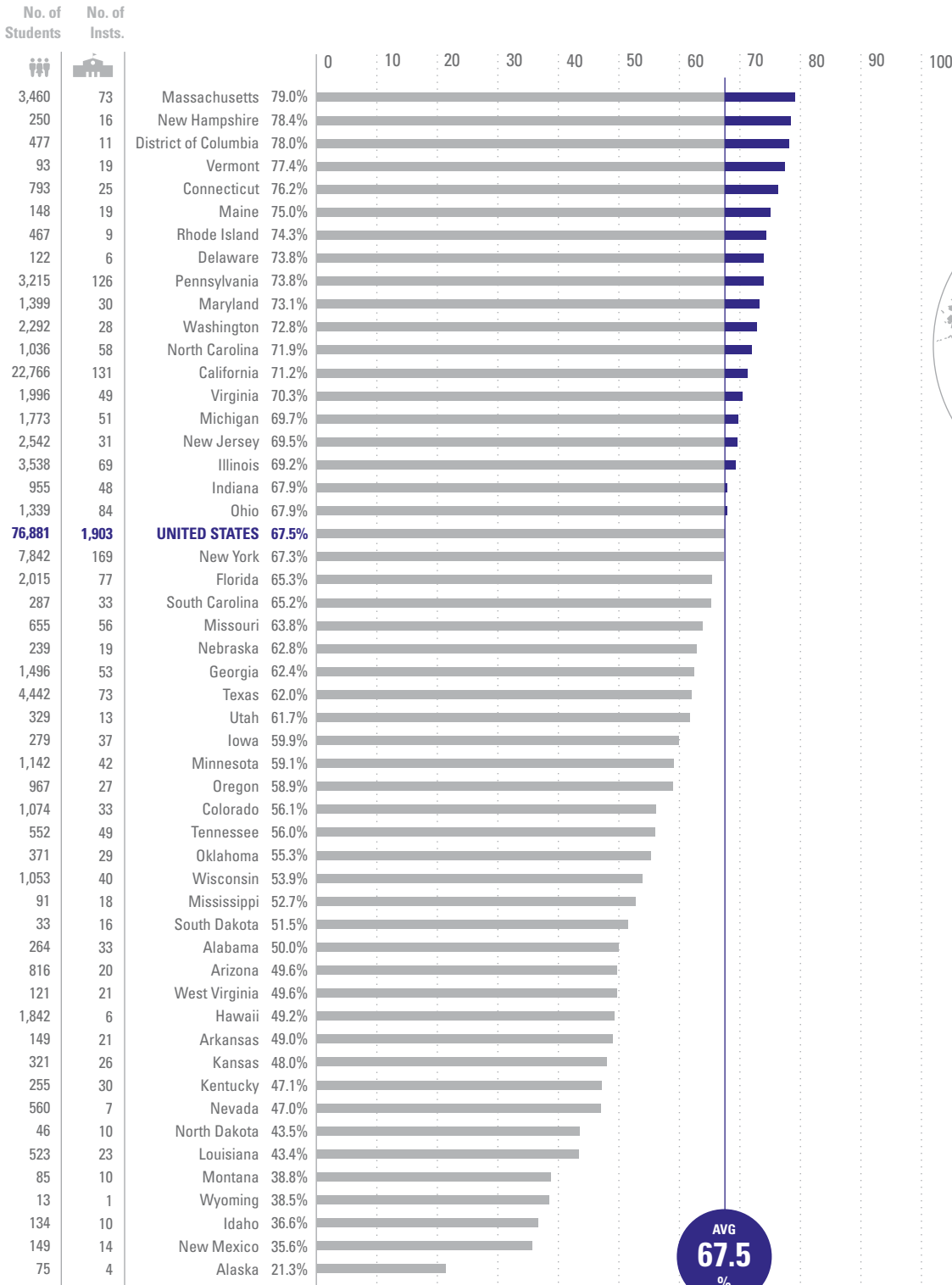
9.3h

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
67.5
%

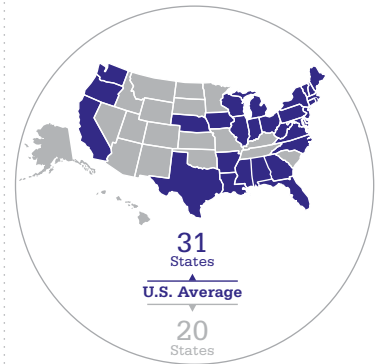
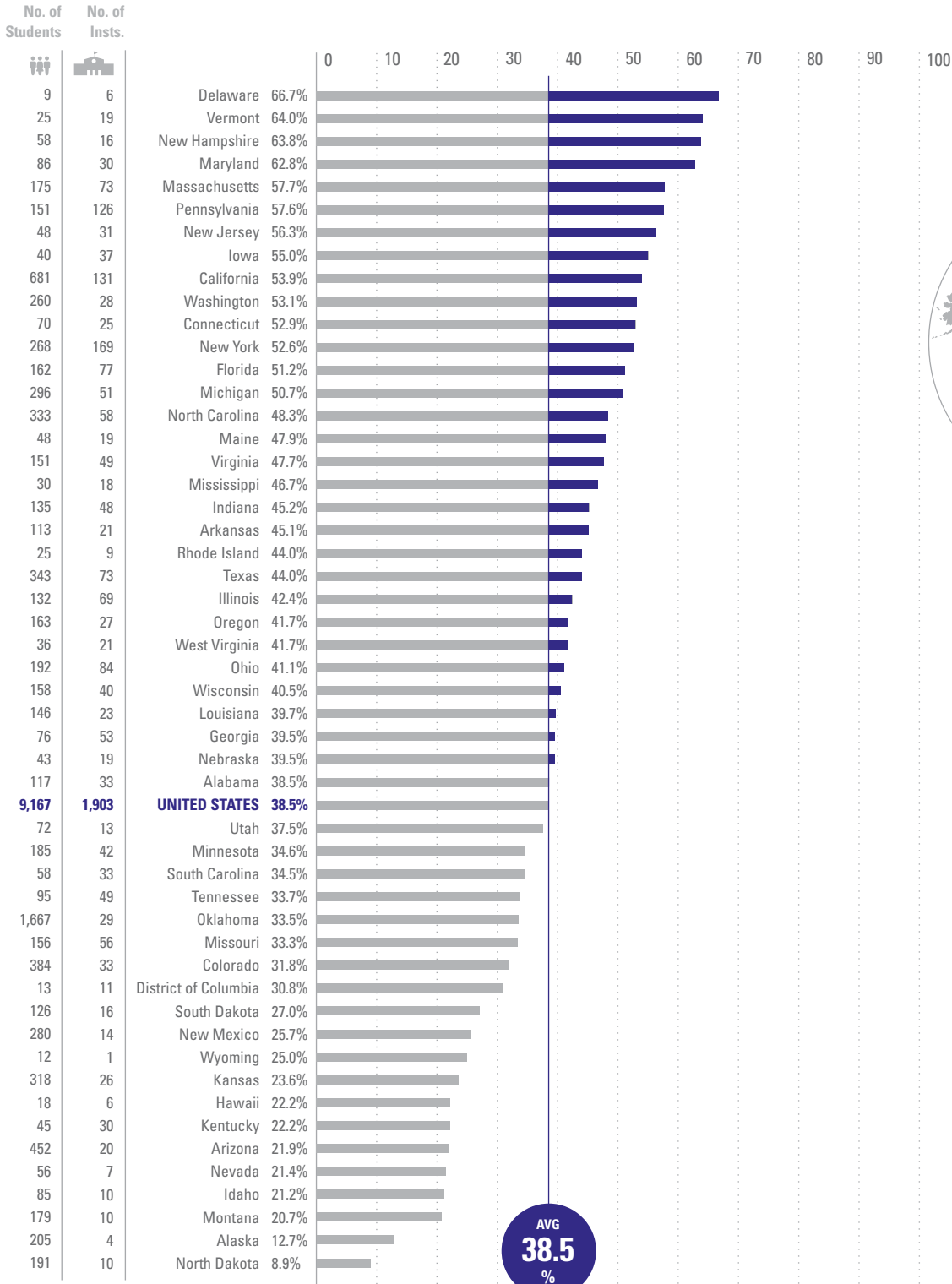
9.3i

Six-Year Graduation Rates of American Indian or Alaska Native Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
38.5
%

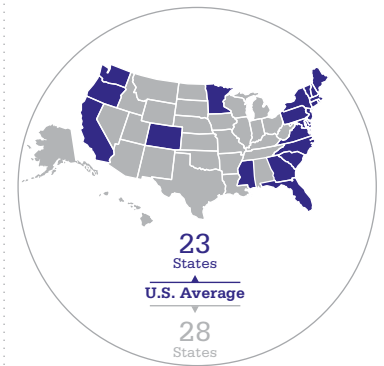
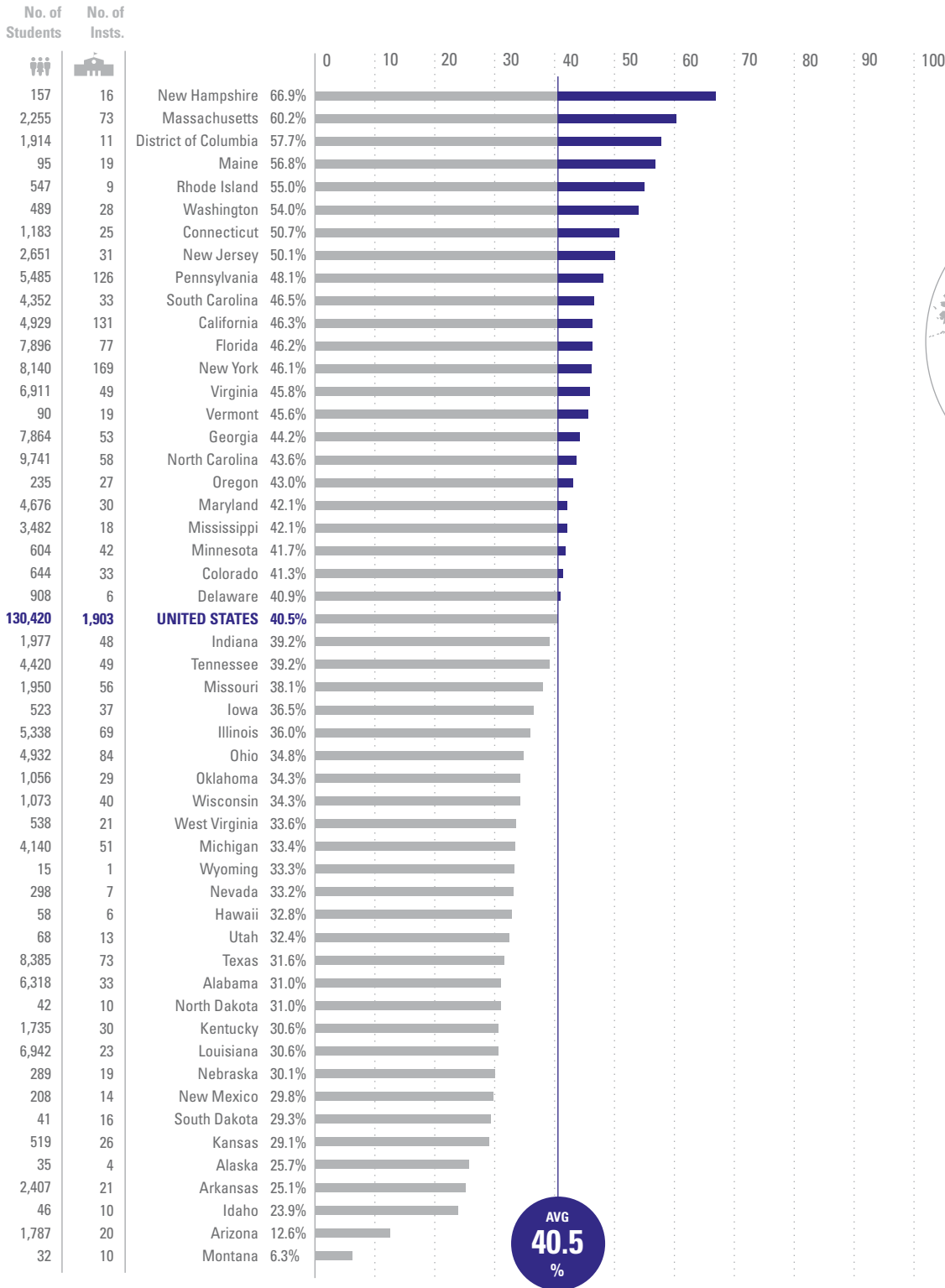
9.3j

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Black or African American Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
40.5
%

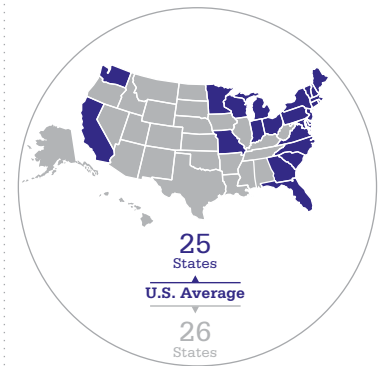
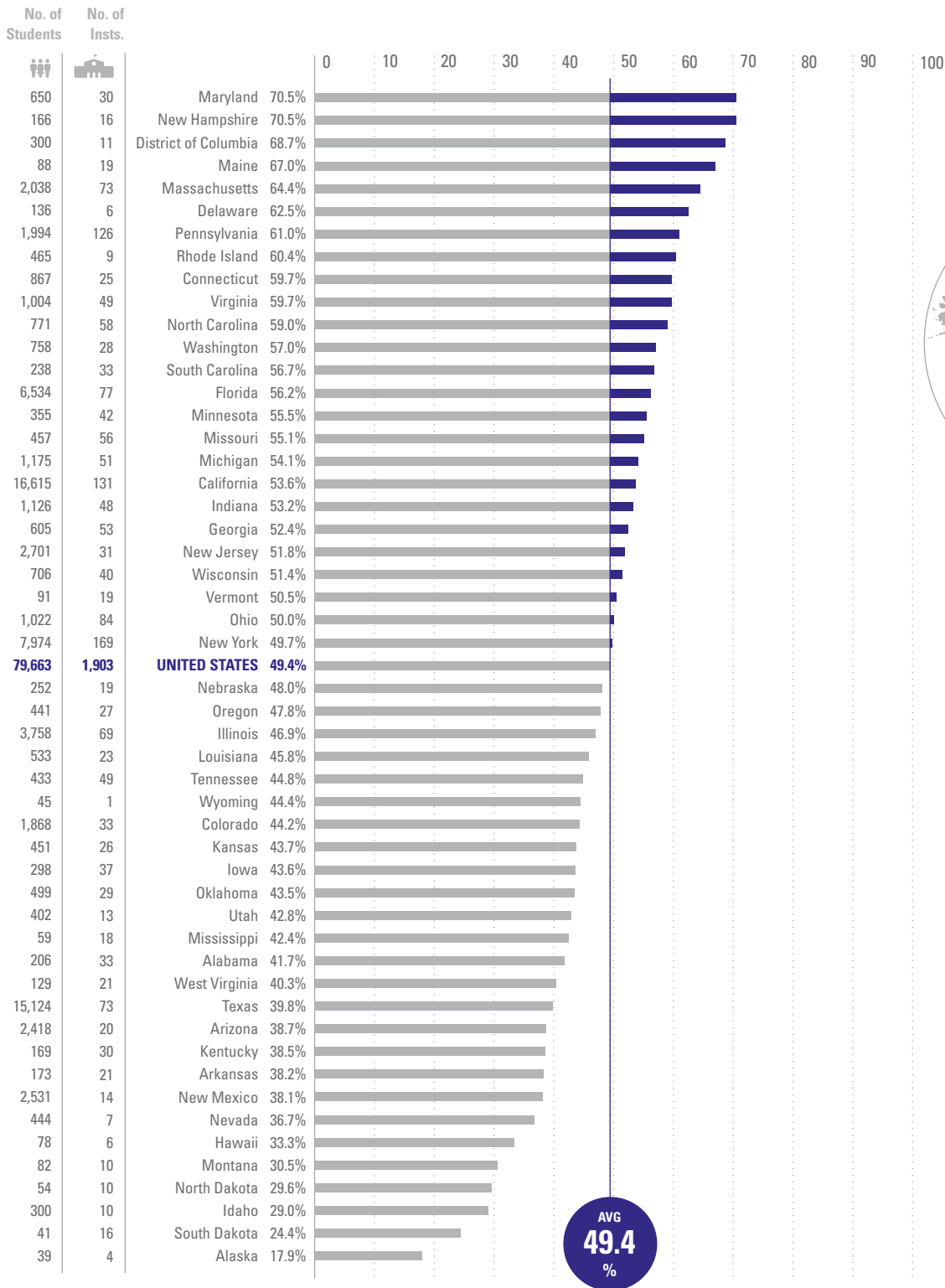
9.3k

Six-Year Graduation Rates of Hispanic or Latino Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
49.4
%

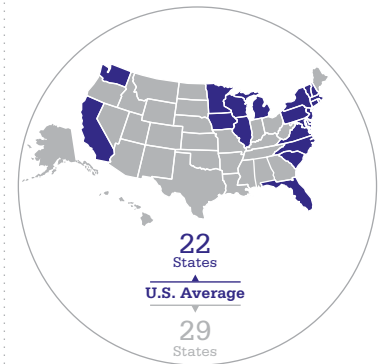
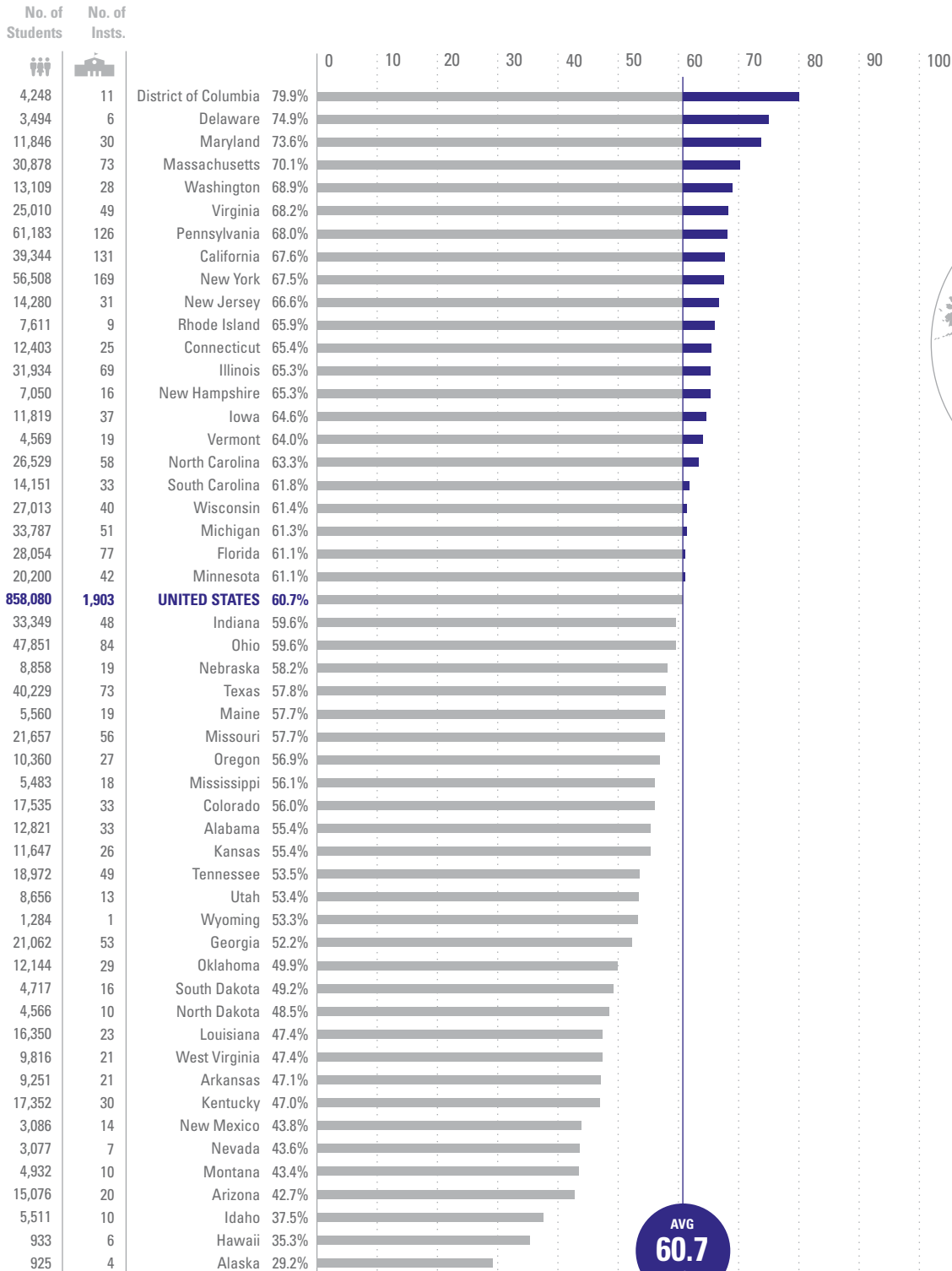
9.31

Six-Year Graduation Rates of White Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

Updated data source



Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



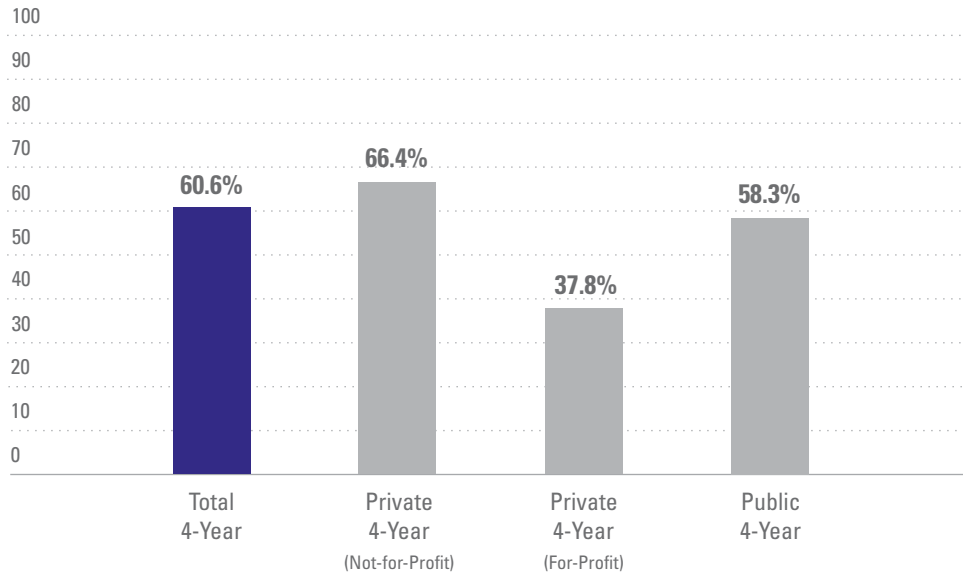
AVG
60.7
%

9.3m

National Eight-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008

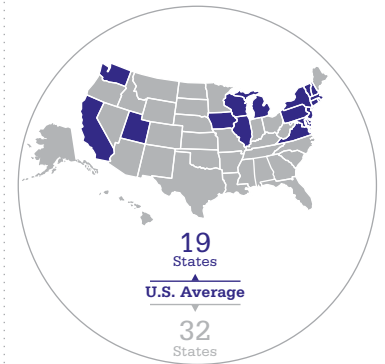
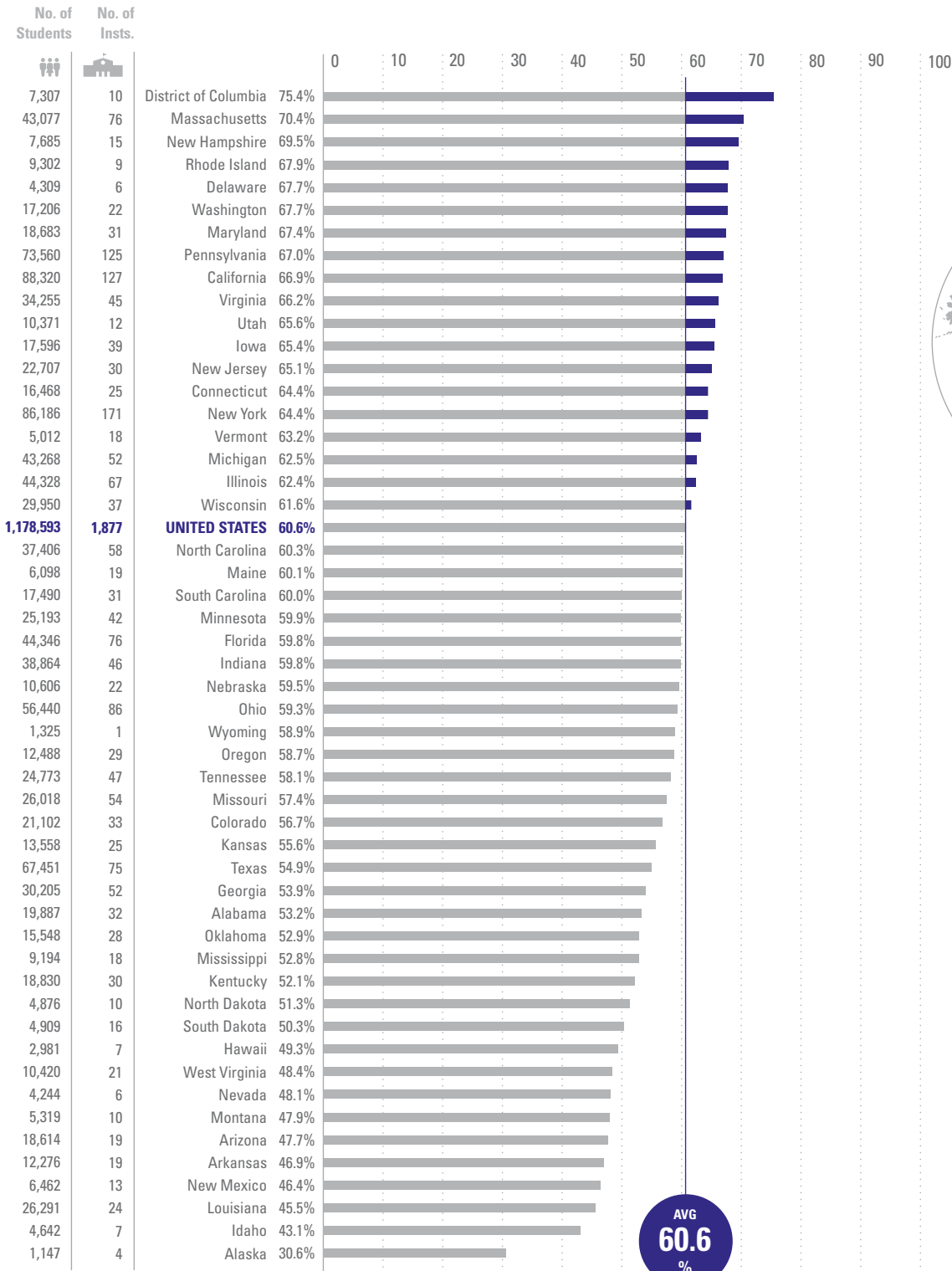


9.3n

Eight-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



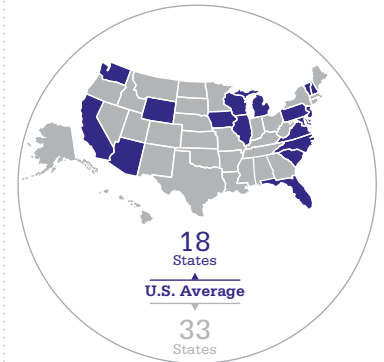
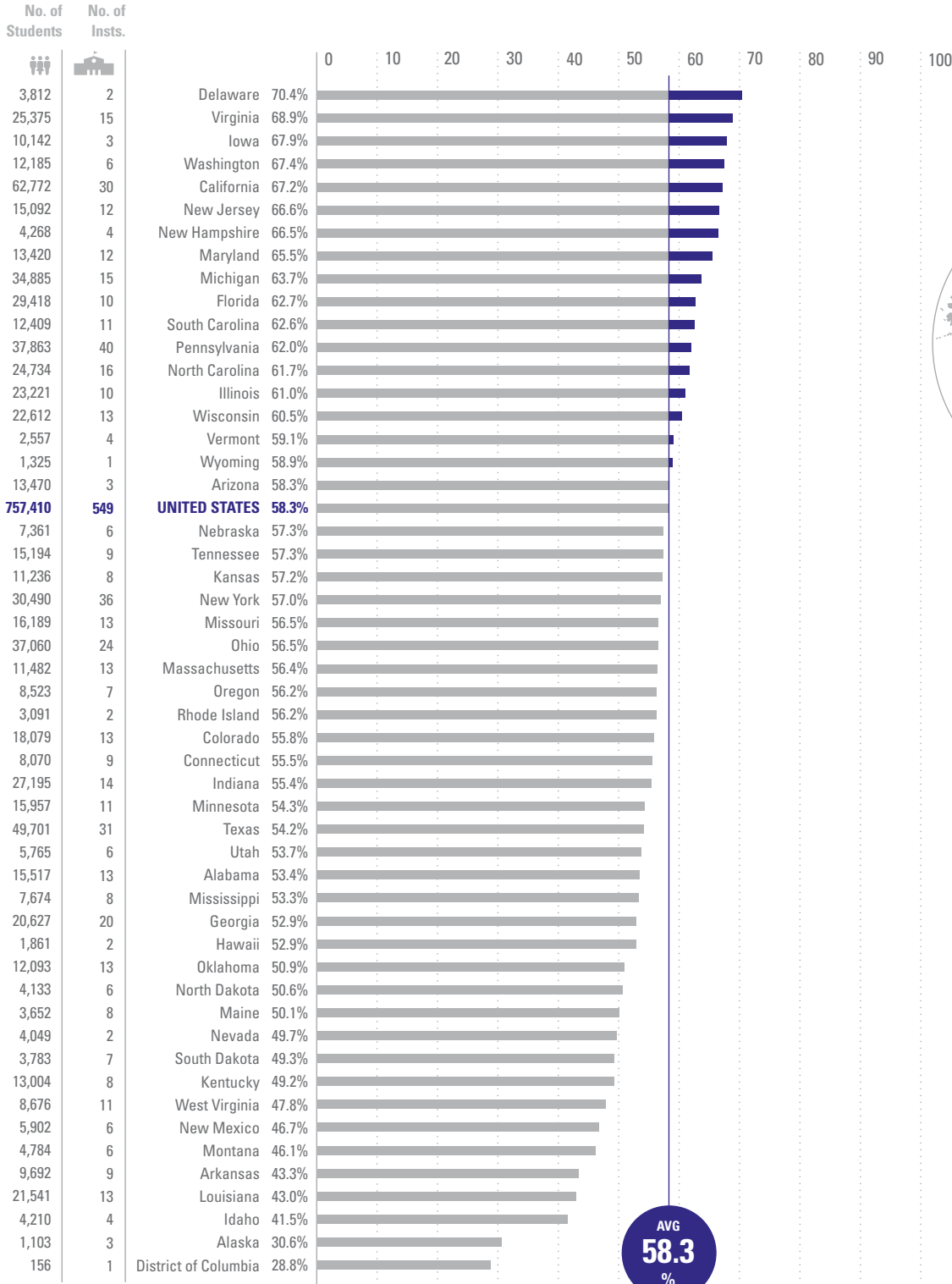
AVG
60.6
%

9.3o

Eight-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Public Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



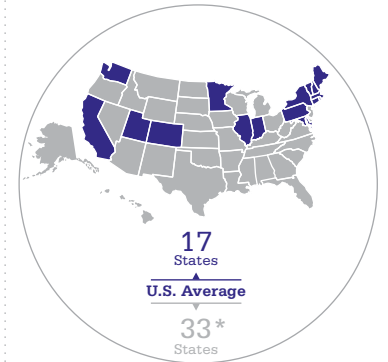
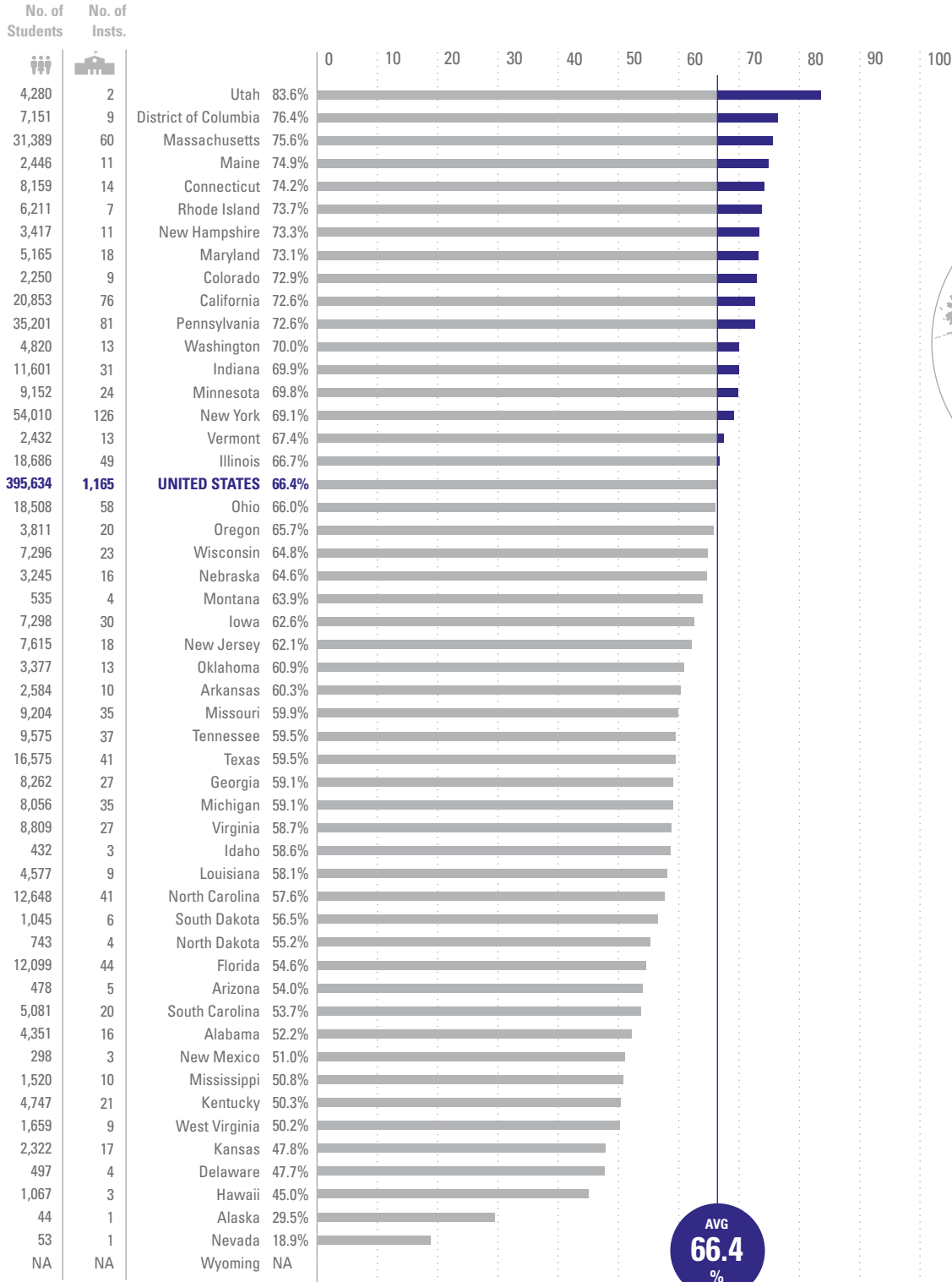
AVG
58.3
%

9.3p

Eight-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Private Not-for-Profit Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
66.4
%

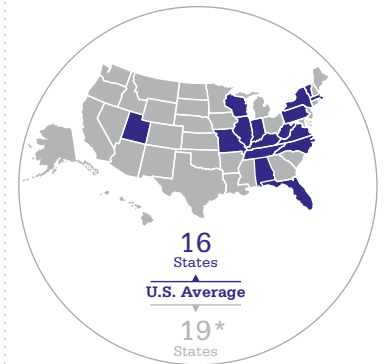
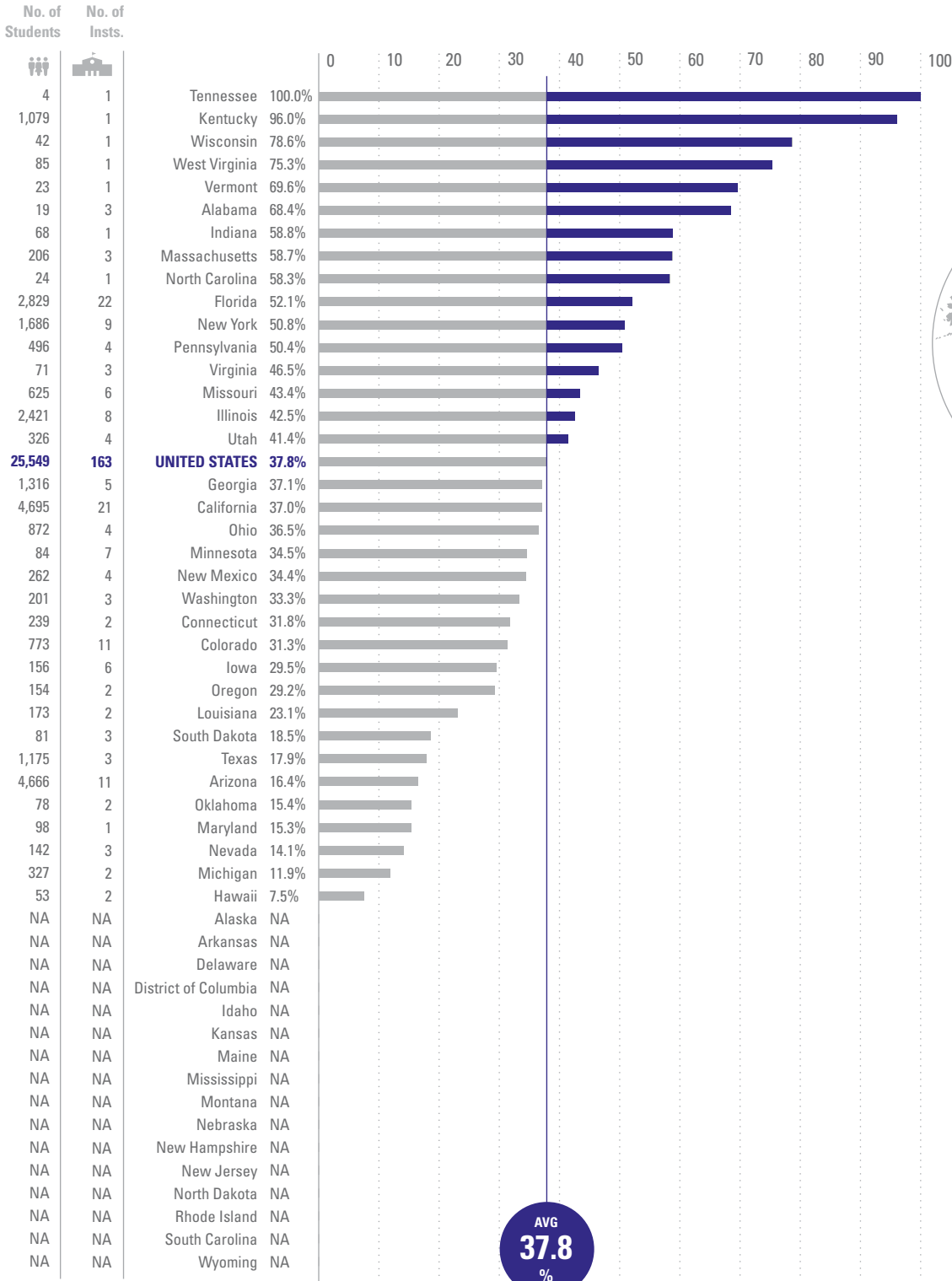
* Indicator data not available for all states.

9.3q

Eight-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at Private For-Profit Four-Year Colleges by State Rank, 2008

New figure +

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation 200 and Institutional Characteristics Surveys, 2008



AVG
37.8
%

* Indicator data not available for all states.

36.0%

As of 2009, the number of associate degrees has increased 36.0 percent from 1,159,550 in 2001 to 1,577,136 in 2009.

29.6%

As of 2009, the number of bachelor's degrees has increased 29.6 percent from 2,597,018 in 2001 to 3,366,858 in 2009.

1.1%

As of 2009, 1.1 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to American Indians or Alaska Natives.

Degrees Awarded at Colleges and Universities

What is this measure, and why is this measure important? This indicator measures the number of degrees that are awarded in the United States each year by degree type, sector, field, race/ethnicity, gender and state. This measure is important because it shows the actual production of degrees by colleges and universities in the United States.

What are the policy issues associated with this measure? Unlike graduation rates, this measure includes those who earn degrees who do not graduate in a specified amount of time (e.g., 150 percent of time) and those graduates who attend school part time and those who transfer from another institution. These students are not currently included in graduation rates, and national data systems do not yet exist to adequately track students across all institutions in the United States.

Where are we now? As of 2009, the number of associate degrees has increased 36.0 percent from 1,159,550 in 2001 to 1,577,136 in 2009, and the number of bachelor's degrees has increased 29.6 percent from 2,597,018 in 2001 to 3,366,858 in 2009 (Figure 9.4a).

Figure 9.4b shows degrees by institutional type. While 72.8 percent of all associate degrees are awarded at two-year institutions, four-year institutions awarded 27.2 percent of associate degrees. Almost all bachelor's degrees were awarded at four-year institutions.

There is considerable variability by race/ethnicity. Figure 9.4c shows that 1.1 percent of associate degrees are awarded to American Indians or Alaska Natives; 5.3 percent of associate degrees are awarded to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; 13.1 percent of associate degrees are awarded to African Americans, and 12.7 percent of associate degrees are awarded to Hispanics. These numbers are compared to 67.8 percent of associate degrees awarded to white students.

Figure 9.4c also shows that 0.8 percent of bachelor's degrees are awarded to American Indians or Alaska Natives; 7.3 percent of bachelor's degrees are awarded to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders; 9.8 percent of bachelor's degrees are awarded to African Americans and 8.3 percent of bachelor's degrees are awarded to Hispanics. These numbers are compared to 73.8 percent of bachelor's degrees awarded to white students.

13.1%

As of 2009, 13.1 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to African Americans.

12.7%

As of 2009, 12.7 percent of all associate degrees are awarded to Hispanics.

0.8%

As of 2009, 0.8 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to American Indians or Alaska Natives.

The majority of degrees are awarded to females, including 62.1 percent of all associate degrees and 57.3 percent of all bachelor's degrees (Figure 9.4d). The distribution of all degrees also varies by field (Figure 9.4e). As of 2009, 19.6 percent of all degrees are awarded in business, management and marketing; 17.7 percent of all degrees are awarded in the health professions and clinical sciences; 9.5 percent of all degrees are awarded in education and 3.3 percent of all degrees are awarded in engineering.

The number of degrees awarded varies by degree type and by state (Figures 9.4e-j). The top states that produce associate degrees are California, Florida, New York, Texas and Arizona. The top states that produce bachelor's degrees are California, New York, Texas, Pennsylvania and Florida.

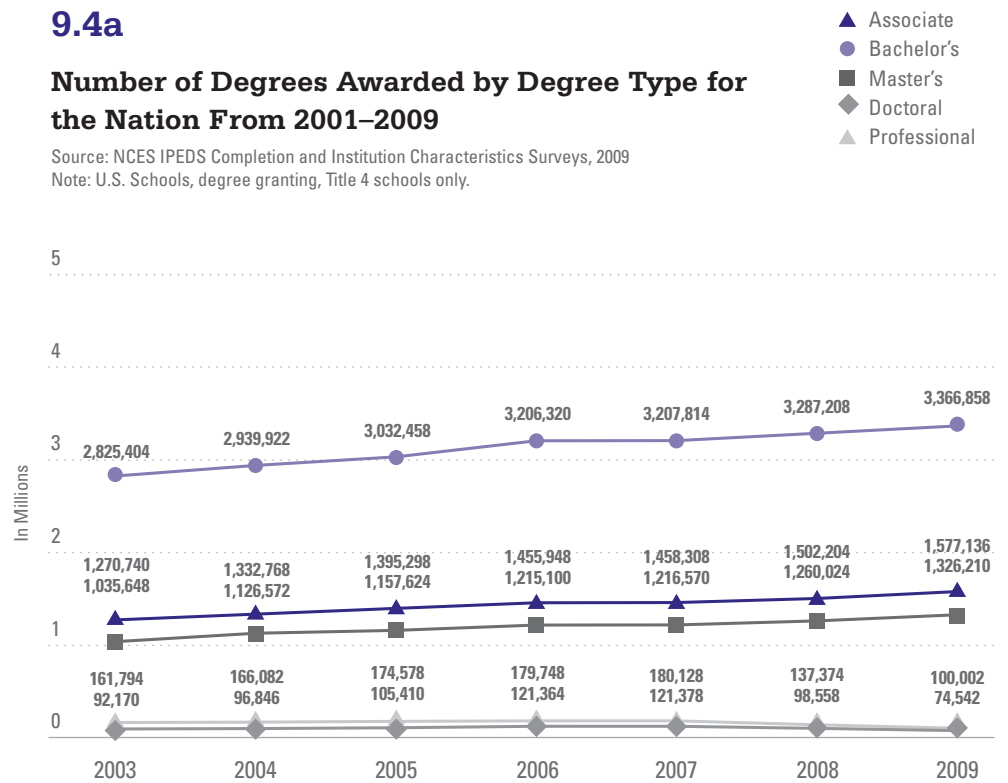
When interpreting this measure, what should be kept in mind?

While degrees awarded to students do include both transfer students and part-time students, it is not a measure of time to degree or efficiency of money spent for the student to obtain the degree.

9.4a

Number of Degrees Awarded by Degree Type for the Nation From 2001–2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009
 Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.



9.8%

As of 2009, 9.8 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to African Americans.

8.3%

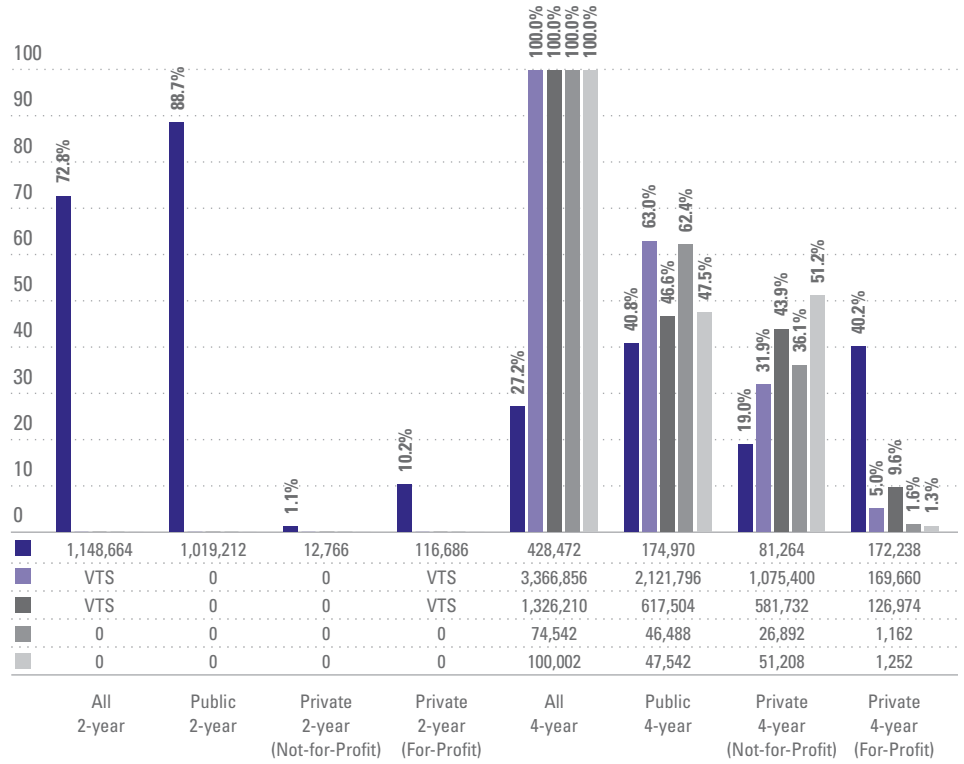
As of 2009, 8.3 percent of all bachelor's degrees are awarded to Hispanics.

9.4b

Number of Degrees Granted in the Nation by Sector, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009
 Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only. Values too small (VTS) to report bachelor's degrees and master's degrees at two-year institutions.

- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctoral
- Professional

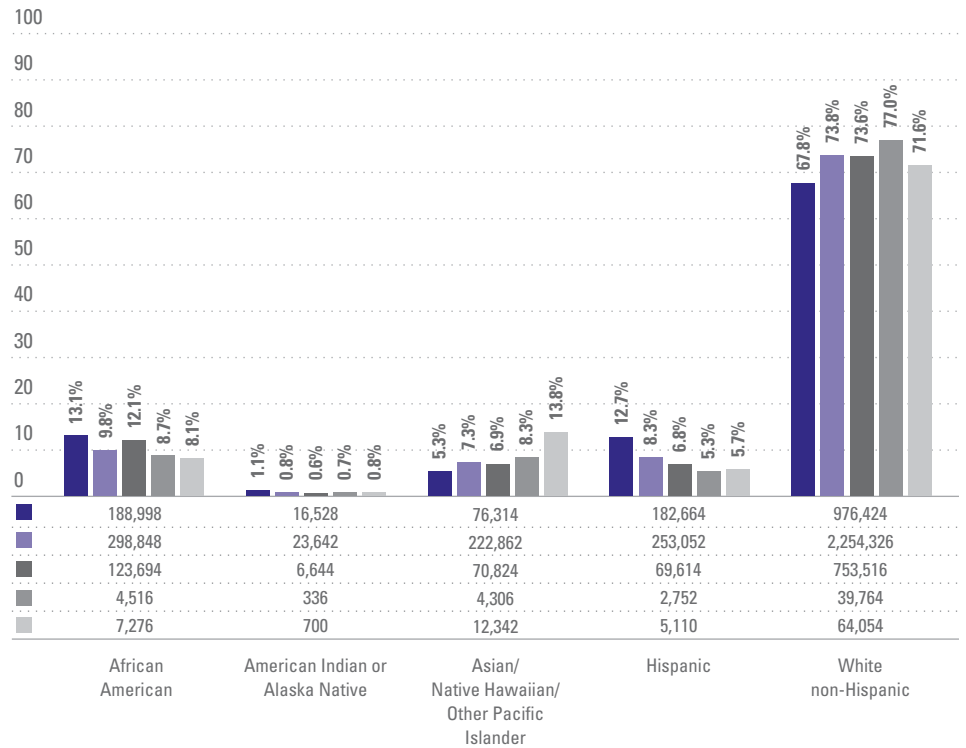


9.4c

Number of Degrees Granted in the Nation by Race/Ethnicity, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009
 Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctoral
- Professional

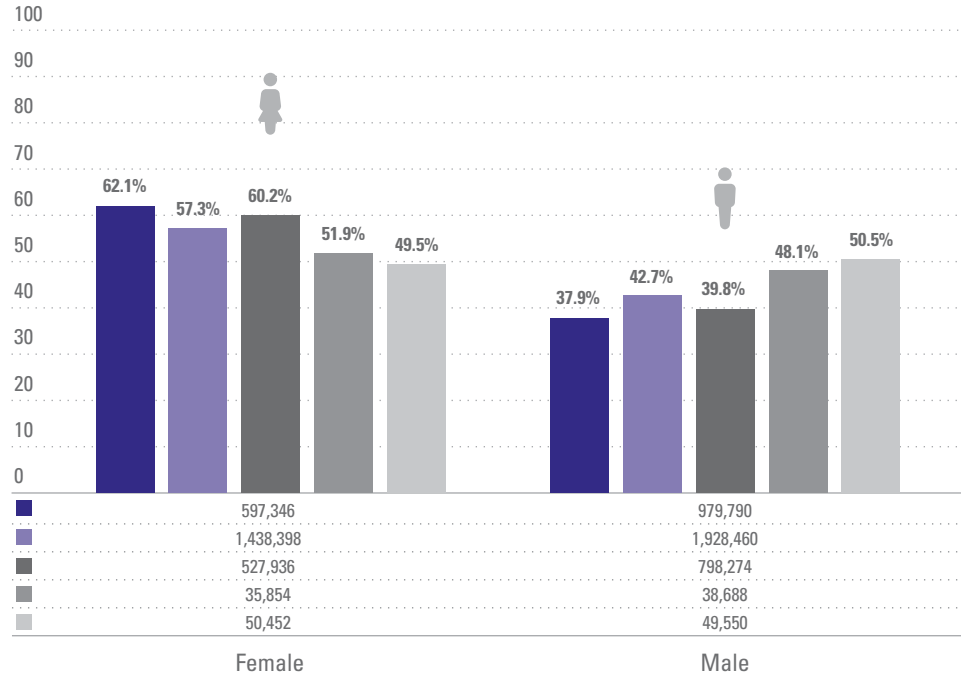


9.4d

Number of Degrees Granted by Gender, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009
 Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

- Associate
- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctoral
- Professional

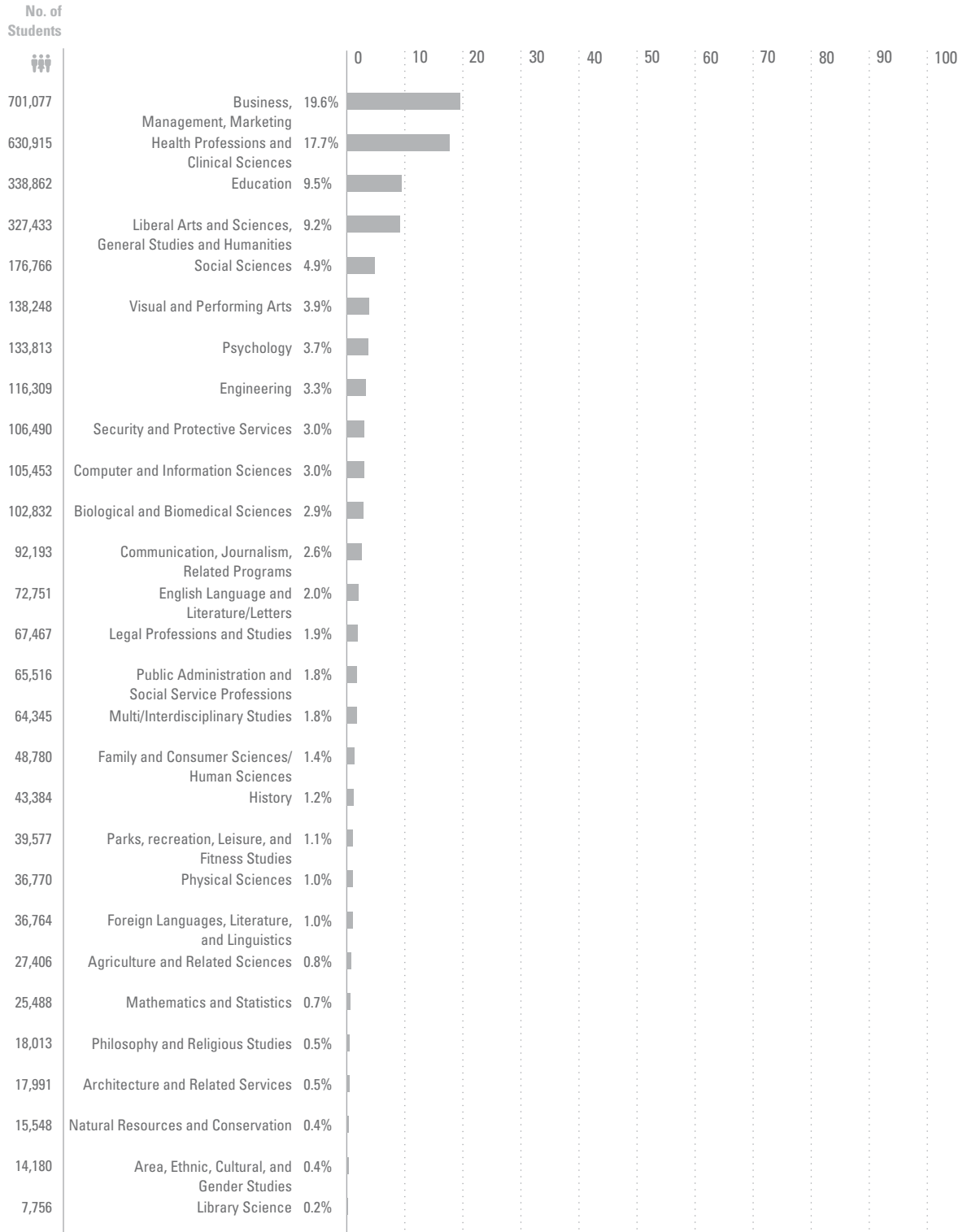


9.4e

Total Degrees Awarded by Major CIP Code, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009

Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

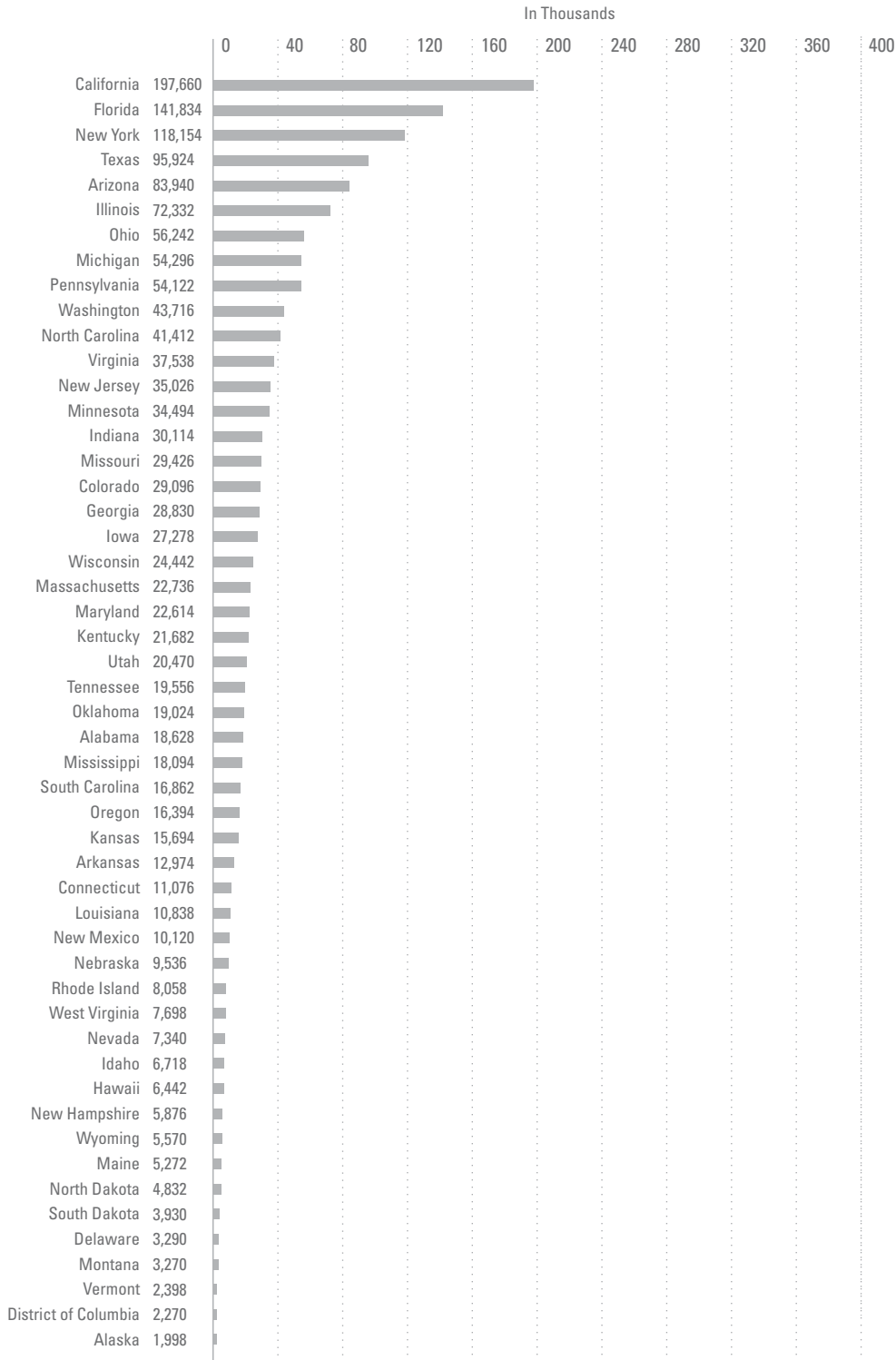


9.4f

Number of Associate Degrees Awarded by State Rank, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009

Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

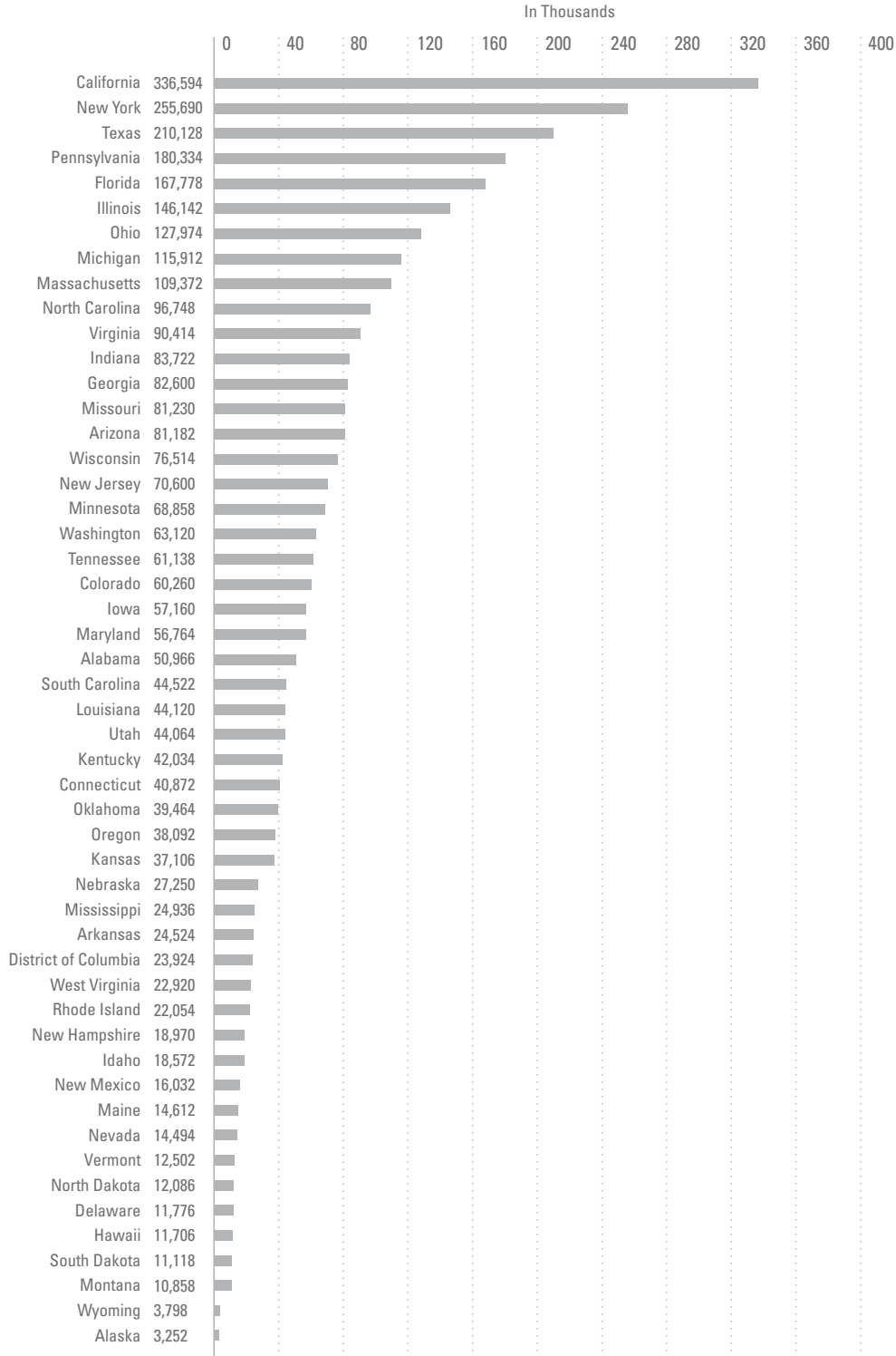


9.4g

Number of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded by State Rank, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009

Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

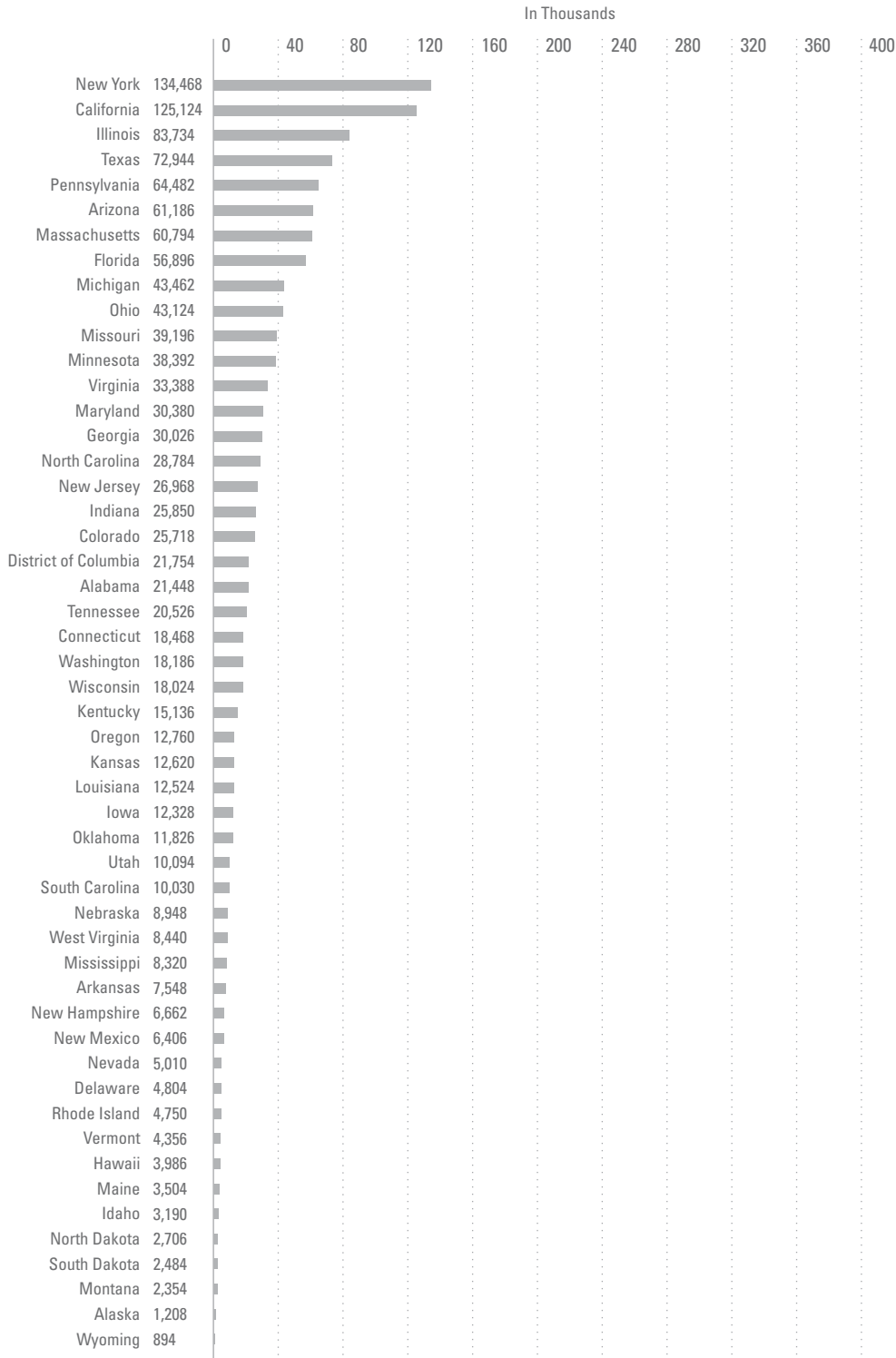


9.4h

Number of Master's Degrees Awarded by State Rank, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009

Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

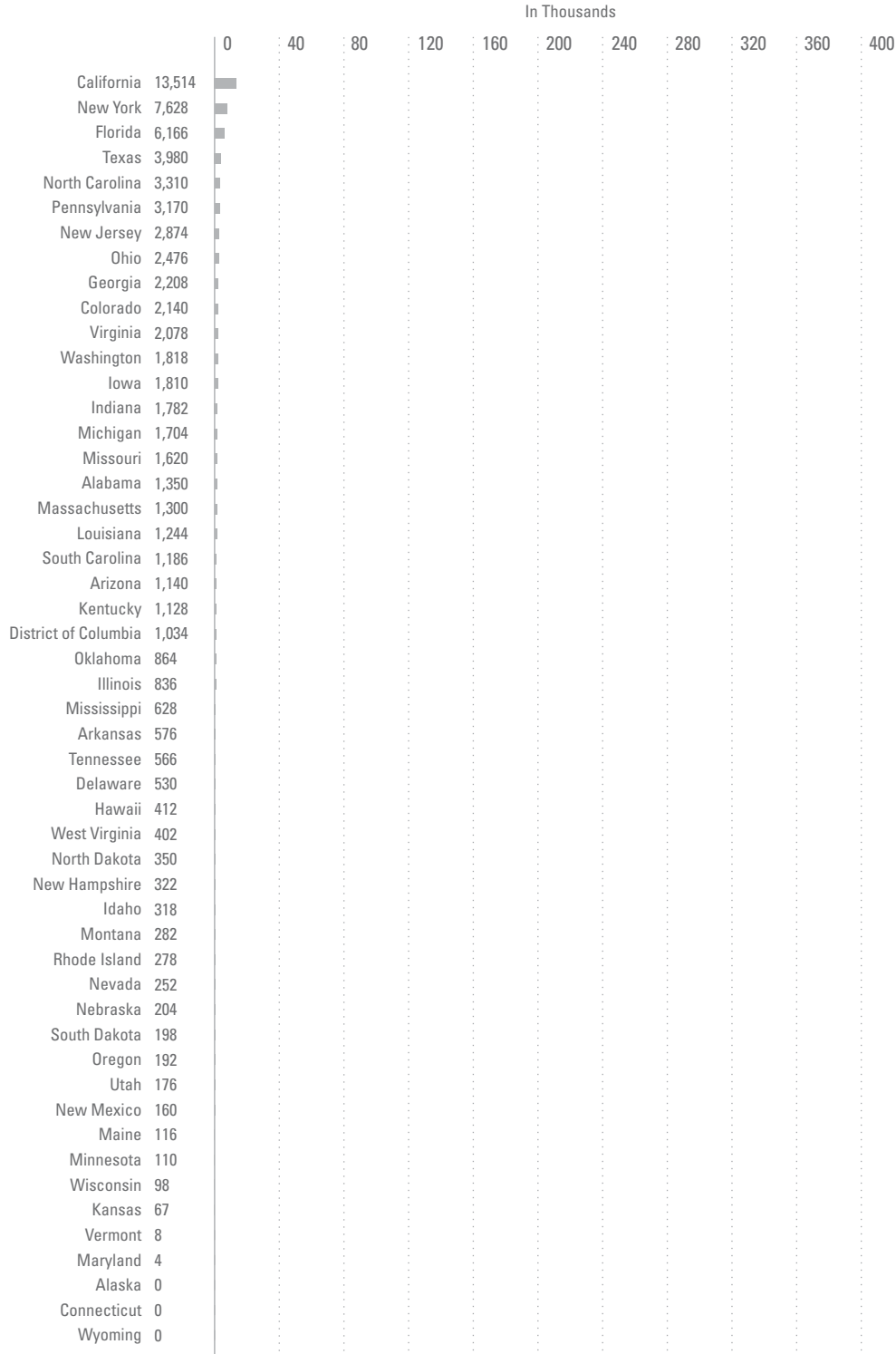


9.4i

Number of Doctoral Degrees Awarded by State Rank, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009

Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.



9.4j

Number of Professional Degrees Awarded by State Rank, 2009

Source: NCES IPEDS Completion and Institution Characteristics Surveys, 2009

Note: U.S. Schools, degree granting, Title 4 schools only.

