

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE®

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First-Year Persistence Rate of College Students Declines

*Biggest Drop Is among Youngest Students,
Says National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™*

Herndon, Virginia, July 10, 2014 -- According to the latest [Snapshot Report on persistence and retention](#), from the [National Student Clearinghouse® Research Center™](#), the percent of first-time students who were still enrolled at any college in their second fall term dropped 1.2 percentage points since 2009. In addition, although the retention rate remained nearly constant, about one in nine freshmen transferred elsewhere for their sophomore year.

The persistence rate is the percentage of students who return to college at *any* institution for their second year, while the retention rate is the percentage of students who return to the *same* institution for their second year. This report measured persistence and retention starting with the entering class of fall 2009 through the entering class of fall 2012, and examined who enrolled for the next fall term.

The report is based on student-level data made available to the Clearinghouse by its more than 3,600 participating colleges and universities, including 98 percent of students attending public and private nonprofit postsecondary institutions. [Snapshot Reports](#), released throughout the year, provide a look in time at emerging college enrollment patterns and student pathways.

Findings include:

- Of all first-time students who started in fall 2012, 68.7 percent returned to college at any U.S. institution in fall 2013. Fifty-eight percent returned to the same institution.
- For each entering cohort year, the overall persistence rate is about 11 percentage points higher than the retention rate. Thus, about one in nine students who start college in any fall term transfer to a different institution by the following fall.
- The persistence rate is falling fastest – down 1.8 percentage points since 2009 – for the youngest first-time students (age 20 or under), while the retention rate has remained nearly constant.
- The biggest drop in the persistence rate among first-time students was at four-year privates, where it fell 2.8 percentage points, followed by four- and two-year publics, which both fell 2.3 percentage points. The persistence rate rose 0.7 percentage points for four-year for-profits.

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“Getting past the first year, either by staying put or by transferring to another institution, is one of the most important milestones to a college degree,” stated Dr. Doug Shapiro, Executive Research Director of the Research Center. “Yet, many students are not returning for their second year and, for too many of those, the option of finding a better fit at a different college seems to be narrowing. Instead of transferring, they are stopping out or simply dropping out altogether. We need to find better solutions for keeping students on track to graduation, whether that means the student transfers or stays put.”

About the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center is the research arm of the National Student Clearinghouse. The Research Center collaborates with higher education institutions, states, school districts, high schools, and educational organizations as part of a national effort to better inform education leaders and policymakers. Through accurate longitudinal data outcomes reporting, the Research Center enables better educational policy decisions leading to improved student outcomes. To learn more visit <http://research.studentclearinghouse.org>.

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