

## Section 2

### Increasing College Retention and Graduation Rates

#### Priority 2. Increasing the percentage of students who enroll and successfully complete a degree.

The second priority recommended by the 2003 LR 174 Task Force is to increase the percentage of students who enroll and successfully persist through degree completion. To achieve this result, the LR 174 Task Force concluded that Nebraska's postsecondary education system must (1) decrease the percentage of students who fail to persist beyond their first year(s) of enrollment, (2) increase the percentage of students who complete associate degrees within three years and baccalaureate degrees within six years, and (3) expand upon and strengthen existing associate degree to baccalaureate degree transfer programs.

To monitor the extent to which the first and second strategic objectives are being achieved, this section focuses on freshmen retention rates and college graduation rates that are based on data collected through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education.

The NCES is the best available source of data for monitoring the retention and graduation rates of institutions over time, either on an individual basis or by sector. However, the retention and graduation rates that are reported to the NCES or calculated using data collected through IPEDS are generally for first-time freshmen who continue their studies at the same institution where they started college. This type of student represents a steadily decreasing percentage of postsecondary students. Consequently, a statewide analysis of retention and graduation rates based on NCES-IPEDS data does not provide any information about Nebraska college students who transfer to other institutions to continue their studies, including students who start college in the academic transfer programs offered by Nebraska's community colleges and then transfer to four-year schools to earn bachelor's degrees.

To overcome the limitations of the data available from the NCES and directly address the third strategic objective recommended by the 2003 LR 174 Task Force, the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska State College System, Nebraska's community colleges, and Commission staff conducted an extensive research project in 2006 using data obtained through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Based on the findings of the 2006 NSC Research Project, about 11% of full-time freshmen and 14% of part-time freshmen at Nebraska's public institutions transfer to other schools. At least 10% of full-time freshmen who enrolled in bachelor's degree programs at the University of Nebraska or state colleges earn bachelor's degrees after transferring to other institutions. The study also found that about 19% of students initially enrolled in academic transfer programs completed a bachelor's degree within six years, while about 16% completed the academic transfer program but did not transfer to a four-year institution. About 4.4% of students in academic transfer programs earned degrees/certificates at other institutions.

A full report of the 2006 NSC Research Project is in Section 2 of the *2007 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report*, which is available on the Coordinating Commission's Web site: [www.ccpe.state.ne.us](http://www.ccpe.state.ne.us). Given the stability of Nebraska's postsecondary education system, repeating this extensive research effort every four or five years should be sufficient to determine if any significant changes occur over time in the transfer, completion and persistence patterns of Nebraska college students. In the interim, this progress report will continue to provide policy-makers with an annual analysis of retention and graduation rates based on NCES-IPEDS data.



## 2.1 Freshmen Retention Rates (Based on IPEDS Data)

**Decrease the percentage of students who fail to persist beyond their first year(s) of enrollment.**

The following analysis of freshmen retention rates is based on data reported by Nebraska institutions to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), beginning in fall 2004.<sup>1</sup> The NCES generally defines a retention rate as the percentage of the first-time freshmen who enrolled at an institution during the fall semester (or quarter) or the preceding summer of a given academic year and were enrolled at the same institution during the fall semester (or quarter) one year later. Separate retention rates are reported by institutions for their full-time and part-time students.

The latest available data to compare to fall 2004 freshmen retention rates are for fall 2008. Retention rates for fall 2009 will not be available until mid-2010 and will be reported in the *2011 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report*.

### **Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates**

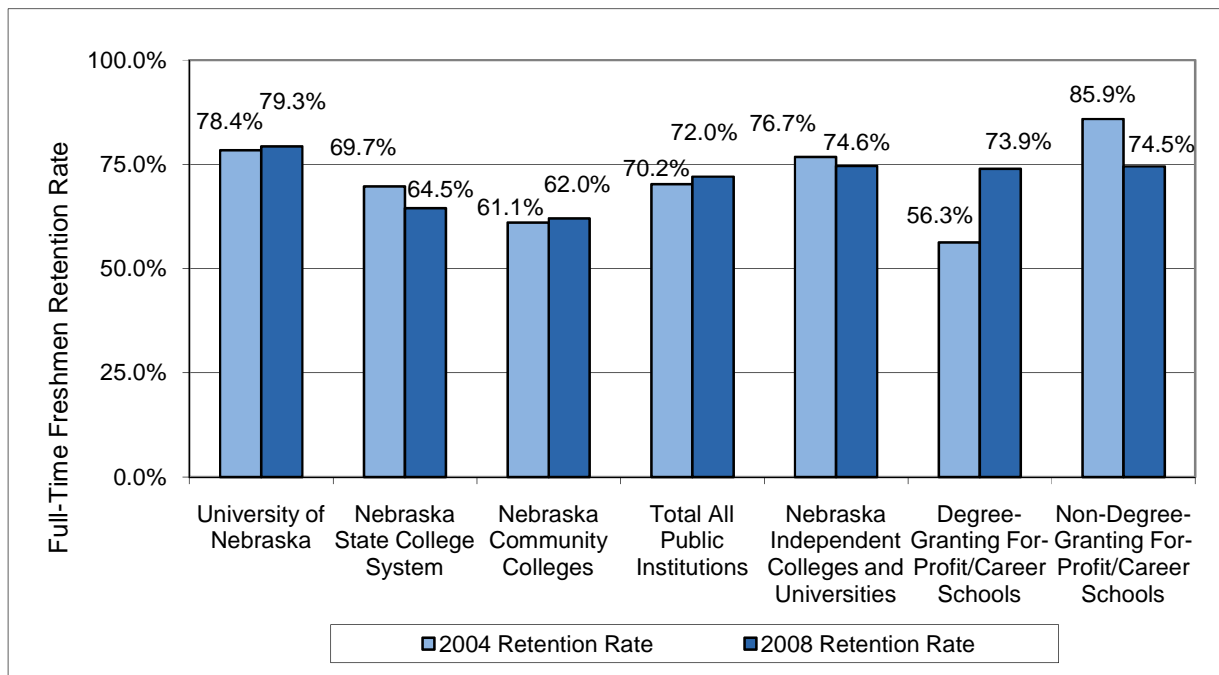
- As shown in [Figure 2.1.1](#) on the next page, there was an increase or decrease in the overall full-time freshmen retention rate for each of the six sectors of higher education in Nebraska between fall 2004 and fall 2008, with no general trend across all of the sectors.
- The most significant decline in retention rates was within the for-profit sector of non-degree-granting institutions, consisting primarily of career schools that focus on hair and skin care training. As evidenced in [Figure 2.1.1](#), the retention rate for this sector decreased 11.4% from 85.9% in fall 2004 to 74.5% in fall 2008.
- Over the same period, the overall freshmen retention rates for the Nebraska State College System and Nebraska's independent (not-for-profit) colleges and universities also decreased. In the case of the state colleges, the sector retention rate decreased 5.2% from 69.7% to 64.5% between fall 2004 and fall 2008. For the independent institutions, the sector retention rate decreased 2.1% from 76.7% to 74.6%.
- The largest increase in retention rates was evidenced for the degree-granting, for-profit schools. The sector rate increased from 56.3% in fall 2004 to 73.9% in fall 2008. This 17.6% improvement was due, almost entirely, to increased retention rates at Kaplan University's Omaha campus and the ITT Technical Institute in Omaha. Five of the other eight institutions in this sector had to be excluded from the analysis because they did not report a retention rate in 2004, did not enroll freshmen, were not open in 2004, or closed before 2008. Consequently, further monitoring of the sector rate is necessary to come to any conclusion about the sector as a whole in terms of retention of full-time freshmen.

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<sup>1</sup>The analyses of freshmen retention rates included in the *2004 Baseline Report for the LR 174 Higher Education Task Force* and the *2005 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report for the LR 75 Legislative Evaluation Task Force* were based on the retention rates for full-time freshmen voluntarily reported to ACT, Inc. When more complete data, including the retention rates for part-time students, became available from the NCES, it was advisable to discontinue using data obtained from ACT, Inc. and change the baseline for comparisons to fall 2004, the first period for which the NCES required institutions to report retention rates for full-time and part-time freshmen.

- The overall full-time freshmen retention rate for the University of Nebraska and Nebraska’s community colleges also each increased 0.9%. As shown in [Figure 2.1.1](#), the university’s retention rate increased from 78.4% in fall 2004 to 79.3% in fall 2008, while the rate for the state’s community increased from 61.1% to 62.0%.
- The net effect of these increases and decreases was that the estimated overall full-time retention rate for the three public sectors increased 1.8%, from 70.2% in fall 2004 to 72.0% in fall 2008, while the rate for all institutions in Nebraska increased 1.3%, from 71.4% in fall 2004 to 72.7% in fall 2008.
- See [Table A9.1](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for data related to the calculated sector and state retention rates for full-time freshmen and [Table A9.4](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for the full-time retention rates for fall 2004 and fall 2008 reported by the institutions within each sector.

**Figure 2.1.1**  
**Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates**  
**of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector**  
**Fall 2007 Compared to Fall 2004 Baseline<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup>Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), fall 2004 and 2008 surveys. See [Table A9.1](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data.

- [Figure 2.1.2](#) and [Figure 2.1.3](#) on the next two pages reveal that the fall 2008 retention rates for full-time freshmen enrolled at Nebraska’s public four-year institutions was slightly above the national average, while the retention rate for full-time students attending Nebraska’s six community colleges was well above national full-time retention rates based on data for comparable institutions across the country.
- As shown in [Figure 2.1.2](#), the overall full-time retention rate for Nebraska’s public four-year institutions— the University of Nebraska at Kearney, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the three institutions in the Nebraska State College System—was 78.4% in fall 2008, compared to a 78.2% retention rate for the nation.
- Since 2005, Nebraska’s full-time retention rate for public four-year institutions has not improved, relative to the national average or in its ranking relative to those of other states.

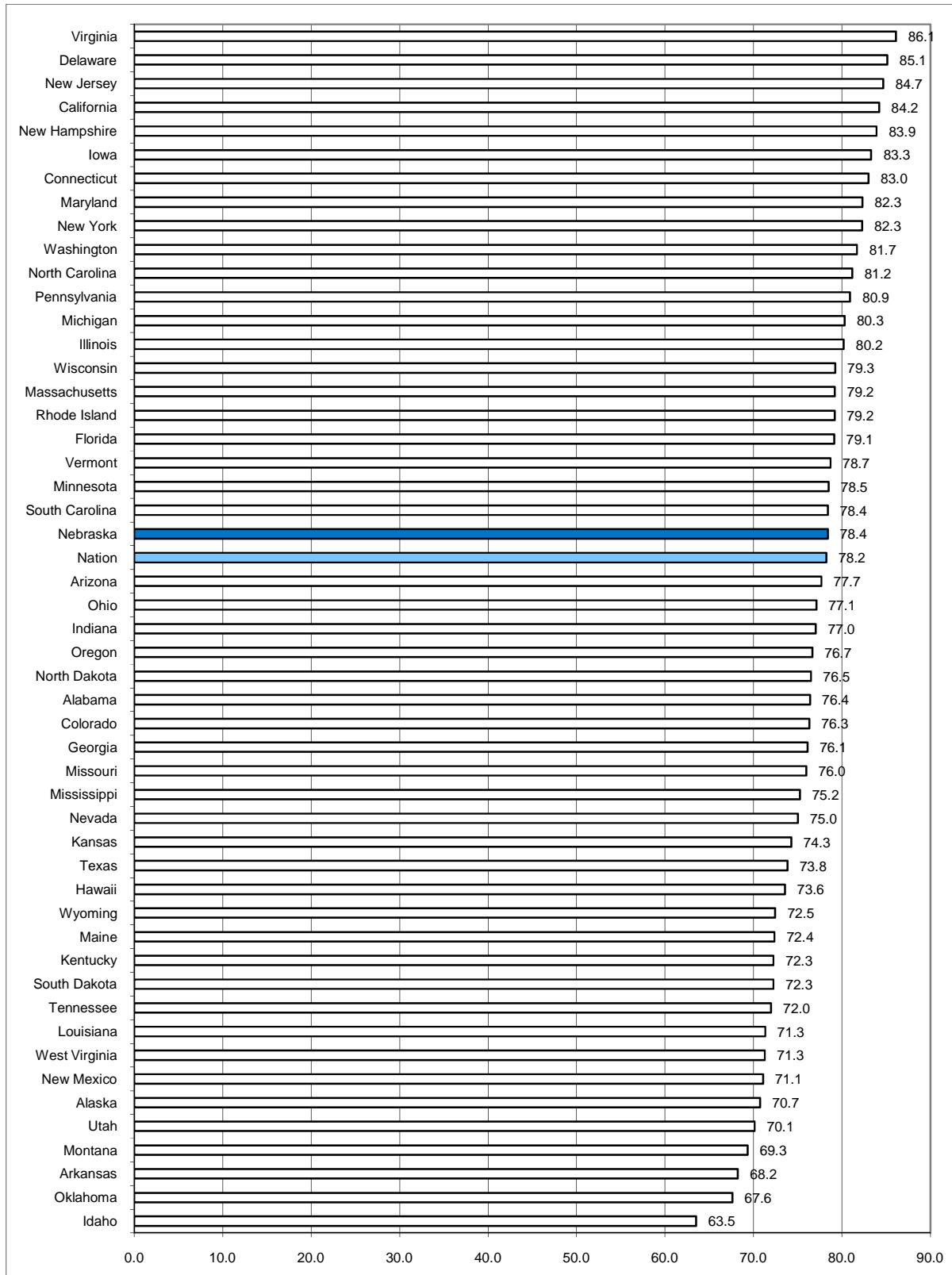
In 2005, Nebraska had a rate of 79.4%, which was the 17<sup>th</sup> highest among the 50 states and 1.7% higher than the national average of 77.7%.

In 2008, Nebraska’s retention rate had decreased 1.0% to 78.4%, which was the 22<sup>nd</sup> highest in the country for four-year schools and only 0.2% higher than the national average of 78.2%.

- In [Figure 2.1.3](#), the overall full-time freshmen retention rate for Nebraska’s six community colleges is compared to the state and national rates for all two-year public colleges. These colleges include public-supported tribal colleges and technical colleges, as well as community colleges. Consequently, retention data for the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis (NCTA-Curtis) and the Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC), which is federally supported, are included in the computation of the national full-time retention rate for all two-year public colleges. Data for the NCTA-Curtis and the NICC are not included in the calculation of the full-time retention rate for Nebraska’s six community colleges.
- As shown on the chart, the overall full-time retention rate for Nebraska’s community colleges in fall 2008 was 62.0%, compared to a national retention rate for all two-year public colleges of 60.0%.
- Including the NCTA-Curtis (which had a full-time retention rate of 46%) and the NICC (which had a full-time retention rate of 27%), the retention rate for Nebraska’s eight public, two-year institutions was 61.5%, making Nebraska’s rate the 8<sup>th</sup>-highest among the 50 states.
- As a point of reference, the overall full-time retention rate for Nebraska’s community colleges was 61.7% in fall 2007, compared to a national retention rate for all two-year public colleges of 59.0%.
- See [Table A9.3](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for the data used to calculate the full-time retention rates for Nebraska public, four-year institutions and the state’s six community colleges for fall 2005 through fall 2008.

Figure 2.1.2

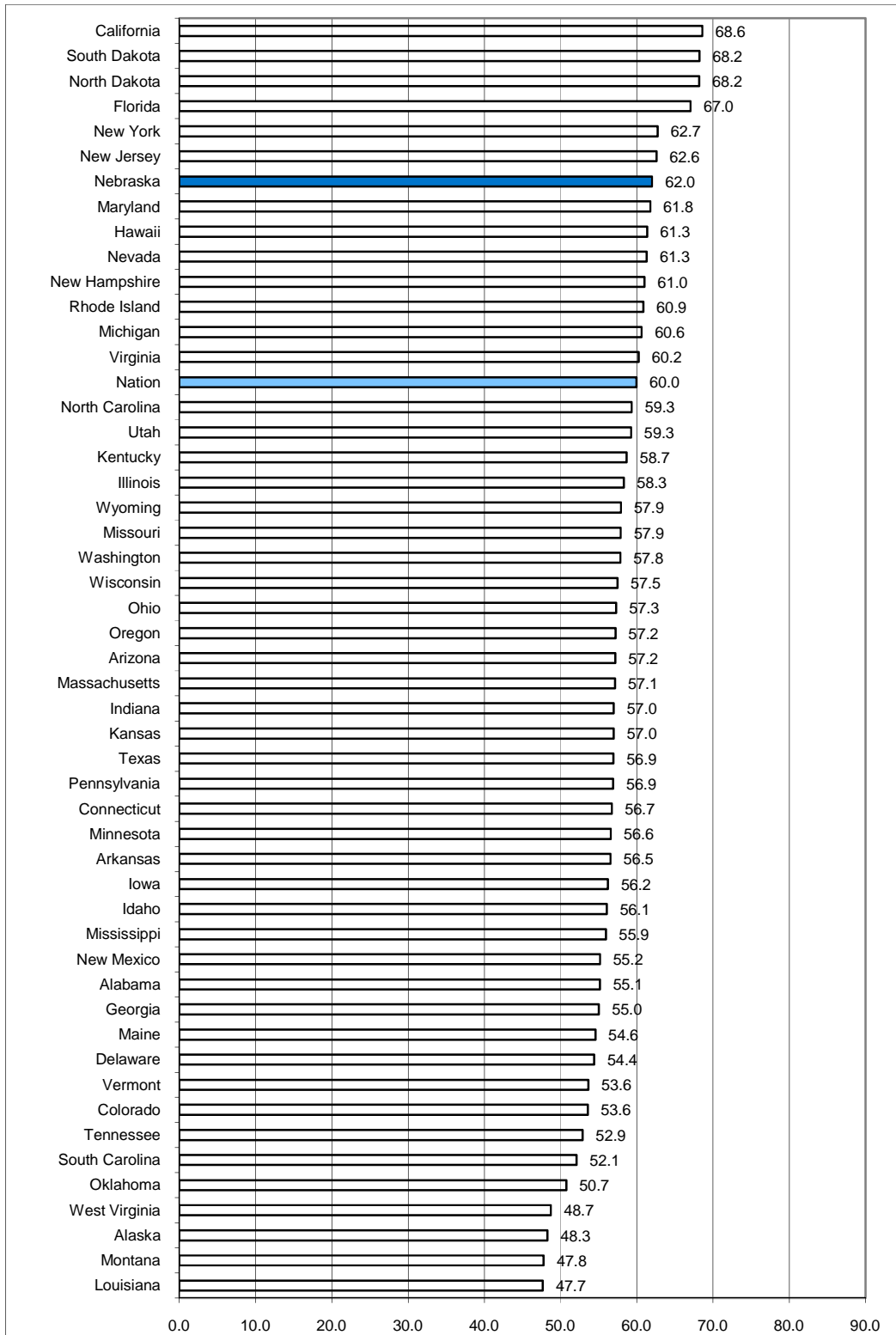
2008 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



<sup>1</sup>Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2008 survey, obtained from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), January 2010.

Figure 2.1.3

2008 Full-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State  
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)



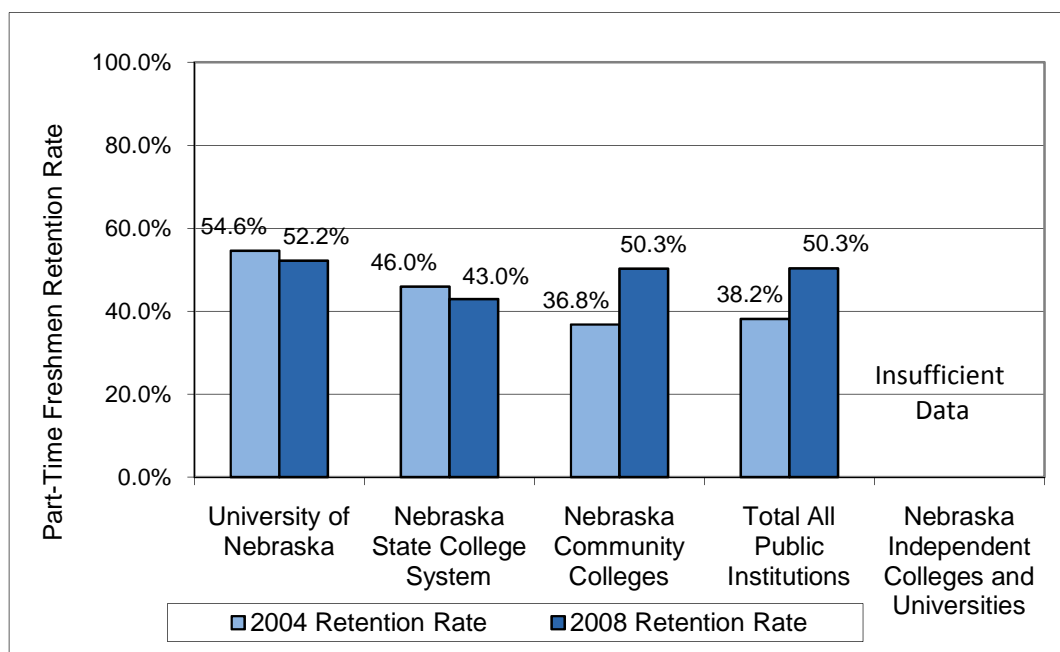
Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2008 survey, obtained from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), January 2010.

## **Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates**

- The University of Nebraska enrolled 174 part-time, first-time freshmen in fall 2003 and 141 part-time freshmen in fall 2007. As shown in [Figure 2.1.4](#), the retention rate for freshmen enrolled part-time at the University of Nebraska decreased 2.4%, from 54.6% for the students returning in fall 2004 to 52.2% for the students returning in fall 2008.<sup>1</sup>
- The Nebraska State College System enrolled 62 part-time, first-time freshmen in fall 2003, 21 in fall 2007. The system's retention rate decreased from 46.0% to 30.8% between fall 2004 and fall 2007, and then increased to 43.0% in fall 2008. This variability is due, in part, to the relatively small number of freshmen enrolled on a part-time basis.
- In comparison, Nebraska's six community colleges enrolled 2,357 part-time, first-time freshmen in fall 2003 and 2,027 in fall 2007, or 86% of the state total (up from 81% of the state total in fall 2006). At the community colleges, the part-time freshmen retention rate increased by 13.5 percentage points, from 36.8% in fall 2004 to 50.3% in fall 2008. This is substantial increase is due primarily to an increase in Southeast Community College's reported retention rate for part-time students, which increased from 42% in fall 2004 to 70% in fall 2008. In comparison, the retention rates for part-time, first-time freshmen at the other five community colleges were between 28% and 35% in fall 2008.

**Figure 2.1.4**

**Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates  
of Nebraska Postsecondary Institutions by Sector  
Fall 2008 Compared to Fall 2004 Baseline<sup>1</sup>**



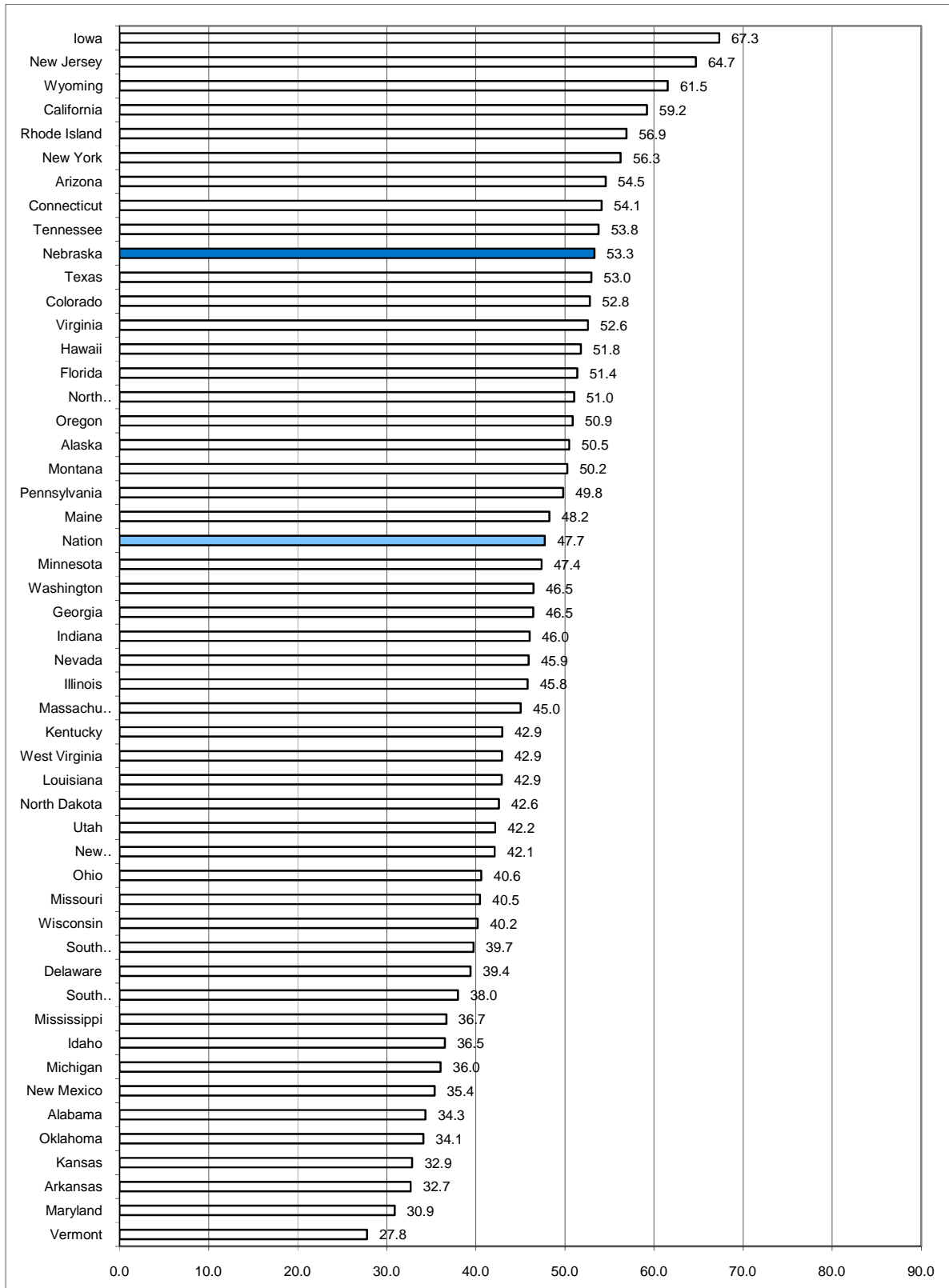
<sup>1</sup>Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), fall 2004 and 2008 surveys. See [Table A9.2](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for supporting data.

<sup>1</sup>The Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) reported two part-time, first-time freshmen in fall 2003, but the school did not report a retention rate for these students in fall 2004. Consequently, for the purposes of this report, NCTA is excluded from the calculation of a total part-time freshmen retention rate for the University of Nebraska. (NCTA reported no part-time, first-time freshmen for fall 2007.)

- Due to insufficient data from institutions in the independent and for-profit sectors, an overall part-time retention rate for the state cannot be computed for these sectors. However, it can be estimated that the overall part-time retention rate for the three public sectors—the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska State College System and Nebraska’s community colleges—increased 12.1%, from 38.2% in fall 2004 to 50.3% in fall 2008. As mentioned previously, this significant increase was due to the increase in the reported retention rate at Southeast Community College.
- See [Table A9.2](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for data related to the calculated sector rates for part-time freshmen and [Table A9.5](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for part-time retention rates by institution.
- [Figure 2.1.5](#) and [Figure 2.1.6](#) on the next two pages show the fall 2008 overall retention rates for part-time freshmen enrolled at Nebraska’s public four-year institutions and the state’s six community colleges, compared to the retention rates for other states and the nation.
- As shown in [Figure 2.1.5](#), the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska’s public four-year institutions—the University of Nebraska at Kearney, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the three institutions in the Nebraska State College System—was 53.3%, compared to a national average of 47.7%. As a result, Nebraska rate ranked 10<sup>th</sup> highest among the 50 states in fall 2008, compared to 16<sup>th</sup> in fall 2007 when the part-time retention rate for Nebraska’s public four-year institutions was 51.5% and the national rate was 48.9%.
- In [Figure 2.1.6](#), the overall part-time freshmen retention rate for Nebraska’s six community colleges is compared to state and national part-time rates for [all two-year public colleges](#). Since these colleges include public-supported tribal colleges and technical colleges, as well as community colleges, the retention rates for the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis (NCTA-Curtis) and the Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC) are included in the computation of the [national](#) retention rate for part-time students. However, retention data for the NCTA-Curtis and the NICC are [not](#) included in the part-time retention rate calculated for Nebraska’s six community colleges.
- As shown in [Figure 2.1.6](#), the overall part-time retention rate for Nebraska’s community colleges was 50.3% in fall 2008, compared to a 40.1% part-time retention rate for all two-year public colleges in the United States.
- The NCTA-Curtis did not report a part-time retention rate for fall 2008 because the school did not enroll any part-time, first-time freshmen in fall 2007. The NICC reported a rate of 33%. Including the NICC, the retention rate for Nebraska’s public two-year institutions was 50.0%, making Nebraska’s rank the 5<sup>th</sup> highest among the 50 states.
- See [Table A9.3](#) in [Appendix 9](#) for the data used to calculate the retention rates for part-time students enrolled at Nebraska public four-year institutions and the six community colleges, which are compared to the national rates shown in [Figure 2.1.5](#) and [Figure 2.1.6](#).

Figure 2.1.5

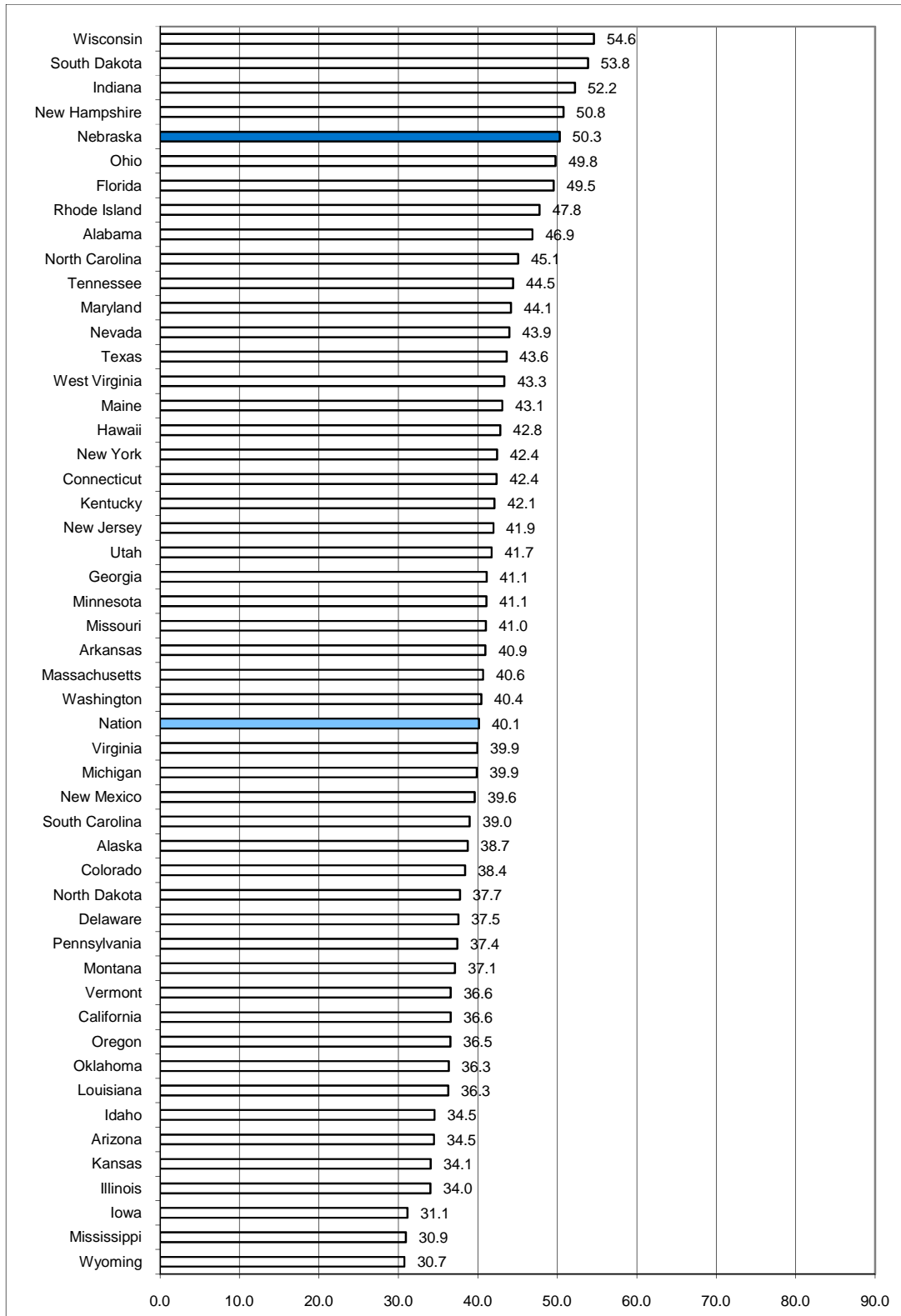
2008 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Four-Year Public Institutions by State



<sup>1</sup>Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2008 survey, obtained from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), January 2010.

Figure 2.1.6

2008 Part-Time Freshmen Retention Rates for Two-Year Public Institutions by State  
(Nebraska Rate for Nebraska Community Colleges Only)



<sup>1</sup>Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS fall 2008 survey, obtained from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), January 2010.

