



# Graduation Rates

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## HISTORY AND LEGISLATION

IPEDS graduation rate data have changed over time. These were originally developed to compare the academic achievement of athletes to the student body as a whole. In 1985, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) began collecting graduation rates from their members.

From there, the survey component grew in response to policymakers' questions about gender and race/ethnicity achievement levels. The federal government passed several legislative acts to collect graduation rates for specific groups, including:

- Student Athlete Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (1990)
- Student Right-to-Know Act (1997, 1999)
- Higher Education Act (HEA), as amended (2008)

The HEA, as amended, specifies that all the graduation rate data that IPEDS collects must be available to the public in an easily accessible site called College Navigator. See <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>.

## Introduction

Graduation rates are the calculated percentages of students who graduate or complete their program within a specified timeframe. Graduation rates are important to a variety of audiences.

- Policymakers use them to evaluate legislation and programs,
- States use them as performance metrics for fund allocations,
- Higher education associations use them to drive organizational missions and priorities,
- Schools use them for benchmarking purposes,
- Consumers (e.g., students and parents) use them for college decision making, and
- The media uses them to assess the education landscape.

## IPEDS Graduation Rates

**IPEDS data are collected at the institution level, not at the student level. IPEDS graduation rates (GR) are reflective of full-time, first-time, degree-/certificate-seeking students who started and finished at the same institution.** Students included in graduation rates do not represent all of the students at an institution (e.g., GR excludes part-time and transfer students). Refer to the IPEDS Outcome Measures survey component for data on other student populations and outcomes.

The IPEDS graduation rate is calculated as:

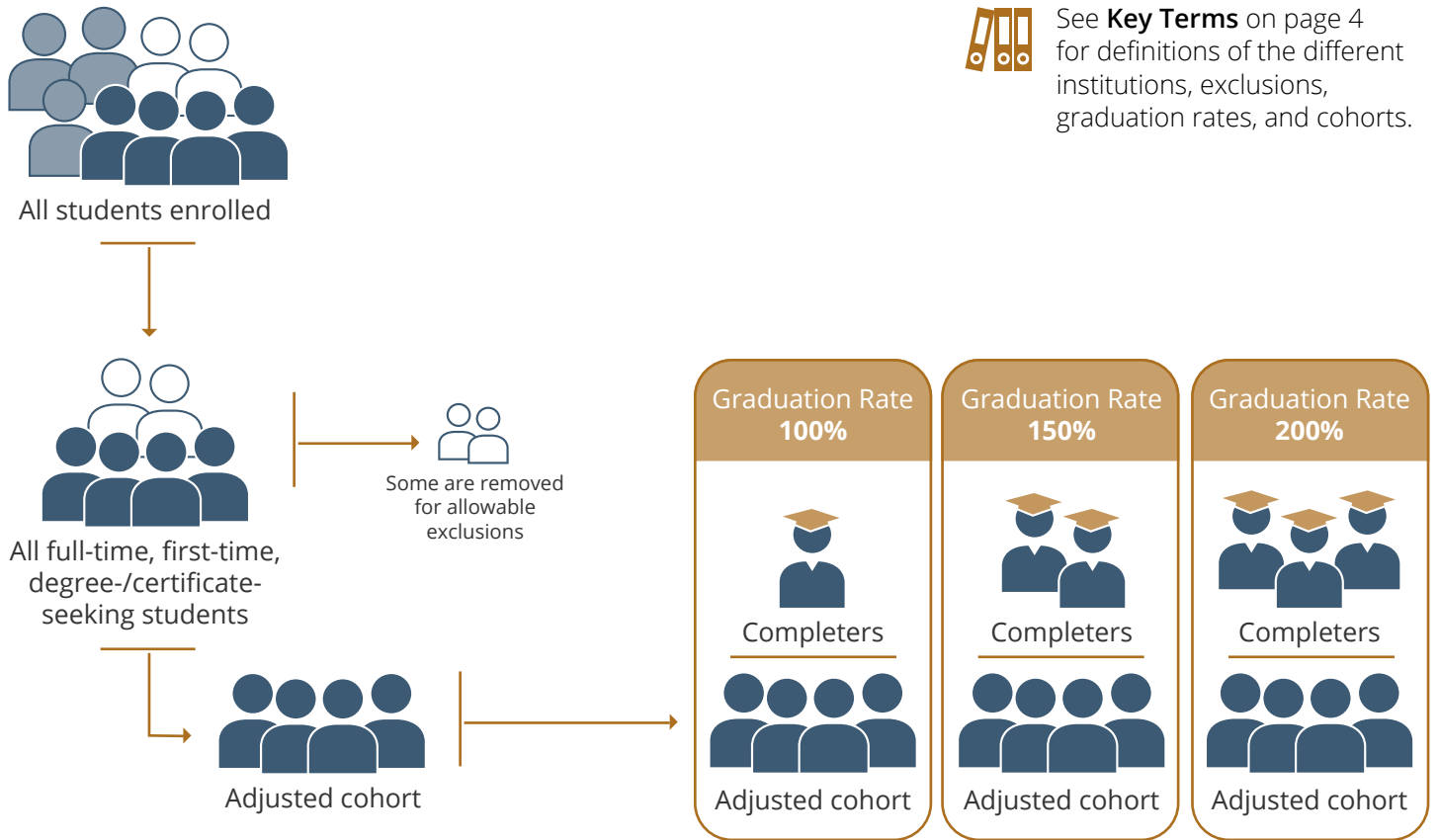
$$\text{GR} = \frac{\text{\# of students who completed their program within a specific percentage of normal time to completion}}{\text{\# of students in the entering cohort (adjusted)}}$$



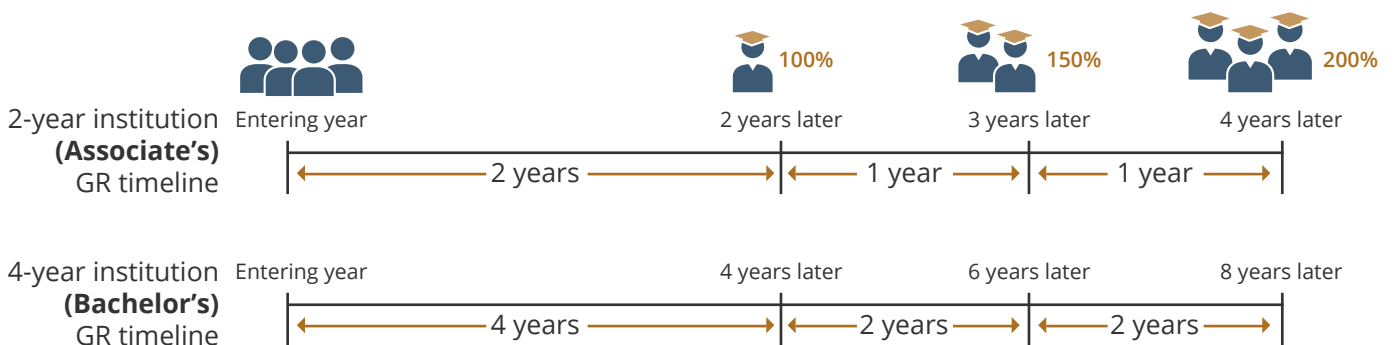
See **Key Terms**  
on page 4.

# What are IPEDS graduation rates and cohorts?

The IPEDS GR survey components collect the number of students enrolled in a cohort year and the number in that cohort graduating within different lengths of time. These numbers are then used to calculate published graduation rates. See the following figure (and definitions on the last page) for an explanation of creating cohorts and calculating graduation rates.



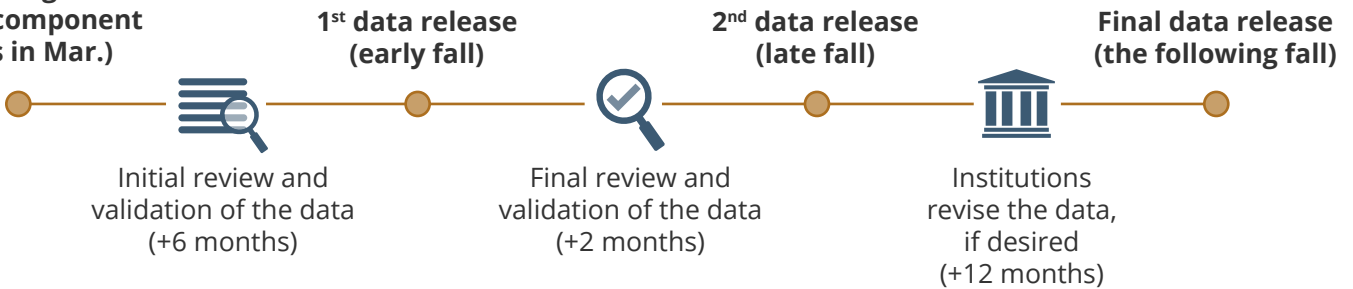
See **Key Terms** on page 4 for definitions of the different institutions, exclusions, graduation rates, and cohorts.



# What is the data release process?

Data are released several months after the survey component closes and after they have been cleaned. For more detail about the data cleaning process, read [http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/resource/download/IPEDS\\_DataReleaseProcedures.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/resource/download/IPEDS_DataReleaseProcedures.pdf).

**Institution finishes submitting data (survey component closes in Mar.)**

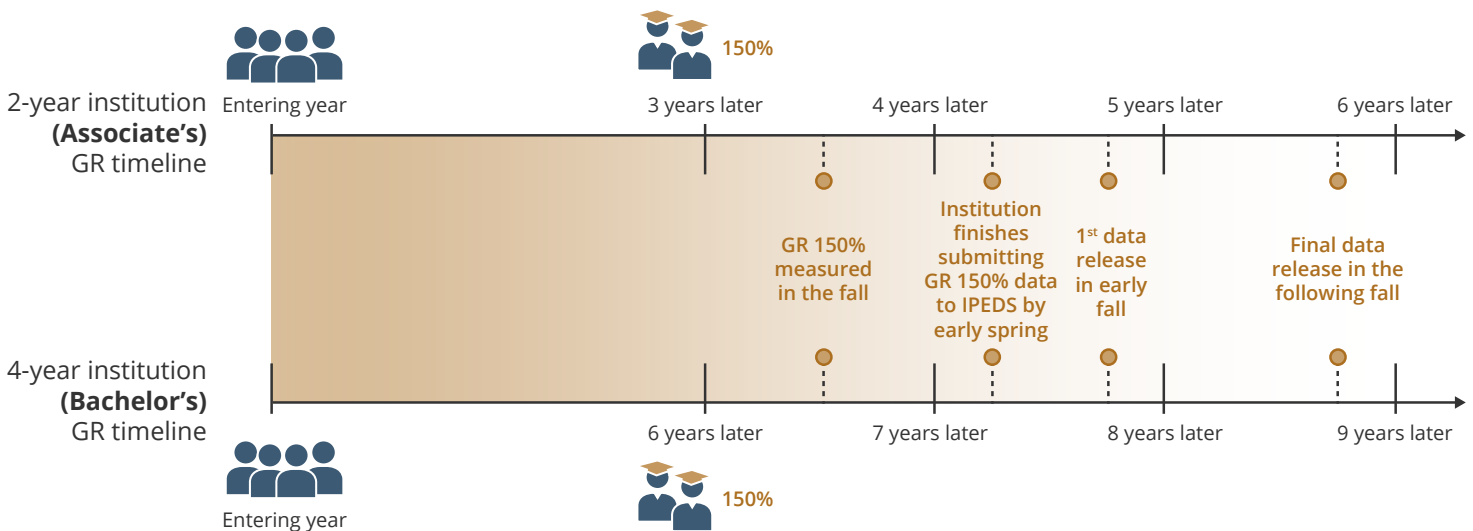


NOTE: Times are approximate.

# When will data be available for a specific cohort?

Because graduation rates are published several years after students entered their program, they are not reflective of the current entering student population. The following figure shows an example of when the GR 150% metric would be collected and released for a specific cohort of entering students at a 2-year and 4-year institution.

## GR 150% Data Availability Timeline for Cohort at 2- and 4-Year Institutions



NOTE: Start and graduation dates differ for schools with various calendar years (e.g., schools that enroll on a continuous basis).



# Key Terms

## 2-year institution

A postsecondary institution that offers programs of at least 2 but less than 4 years duration. Includes occupational and vocational schools with programs of at least 1800 hours and academic institutions with programs of less than 4 years. Does not include bachelor's degree-granting institutions where the baccalaureate program can be completed in 3 years.

## 4-year institution

A postsecondary institution that offers programs of at least 4 years duration or one that offers programs at or above the baccalaureate level. Includes schools that offer postbaccalaureate certificates only or those that offer graduate programs only. Also includes free-standing medical, law or other first-professional schools.

## Cohort

A specific group of students established for tracking purposes. For the GR component, the initial cohort only includes full-time, first-time students.

## Exclusions

Those students who may be removed (deleted) from a cohort (or subcohort). For the Graduation Rates reporting, students may be removed from a cohort if they left the institution for one of the following reasons: death or total and permanent disability; service in the armed forces (including those called to active duty); service with a foreign aid service of the federal government, such as the Peace Corps; or service on official church missions.

## Adjusted cohort

The result of removing any allowable exclusions from a cohort (or subcohort).

## Graduation rate 100%

This rate is calculated as the total number of completers within 100% of normal time divided by the GR adjusted cohort.

## Graduation rate 150%

The rate required for disclosure and/or reporting purposes under Student Right-to-Know Act. This rate is calculated as the total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the GR adjusted cohort.

## Graduation rate 200%

This rate is calculated as the total number of completers within 200% of normal time divided by the GR adjusted cohort.

## Normal time to completion

The amount of time necessary for a student to complete all requirements for a degree or certificate according to the institution's catalog. This is typically 4 years (8 semesters or trimesters, or 12 quarters, excluding summer terms) for a bachelor's degree in a standard term-based institution; 2 years (4 semesters or trimesters, or 6 quarters, excluding summer terms) for an associate's degree in a standard term-based institution; and the various scheduled times for certificate programs.



Visit the **IPEDS Use the Data** page at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Home/UseTheData> for more information.

## Contacts



For help using or retrieving data:  
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For survey component specific questions:  
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<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Home/InsideStaff>