

## 2.3 Graduation and Persistence Rates (Based on Clearinghouse Data)

**Research by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center provides important information about the completion and persistence rates of students who start college at Nebraska’s postsecondary institutions.**

This section of the *Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report* summarizes the findings of a recent study of the six-year completion and persistence rates of degree-seeking, first-time freshmen who started college in Nebraska in fall 2017. The study was conducted by the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Research Center and published in the report *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates*. First available in February 2013, the report presents the findings of the NSC’s annual study of six-year student outcomes based on a national cohort analyzed by state as well as for the United States as a whole. The report is important because it presents comparable six-year completion and persistence rates for students who started college at (a) two-year public colleges, (b) four-year public colleges and universities, and (c) four-year private nonprofit institutions.<sup>30</sup>

### **Introduction to the National Student Clearinghouse Study**

The completion and persistence rates reported in this section are based on the enrollment and completion records maintained by the NSC. An analysis of these records resulted in a national cohort of approximately 2.4 million college students who could be classified as degree-seeking, first-time freshmen in fall 2017. The enrollment and completion records of these students were then analyzed through the six-year period ending June 30, 2023.

Each student was classified by the state of the institution where the student first entered college, not by the student’s residential home state. First-time enrollment status was established by confirming that a student (1) did not show any postsecondary enrollment record prior to fall 2017 (not counting dual enrollments while still in high school), and (2) did not receive a degree or certificate from any postsecondary institution prior to fall 2017, according to Clearinghouse data unless the award date was before the student turned 18 years old. The study was not limited to recent high school graduates.

The percentage of Nebraska’s two-year and four-year institutions with Clearinghouse records varied by type of institution. The data coverage rate, based on student enrollments, for Nebraska’s four-year public institutions was 100.0%, and Nebraska’s four-year private nonprofit institutions coverage rate was 99.9%. Meanwhile, the data coverage rate for Nebraska’s two-year public colleges was 100.0%. (The Nebraska institutions included in the study are listed in Table A12.1 in Appendix 12 of this report.) The Nebraska cohort included 17,261 degree-seeking, first-time freshmen—5,293 started college at two-year public institutions, 8,745 started college at four-year public institutions, and 3,223 started at four-year private nonprofit institutions.

Degree-seeking status was defined differently for students at two-year and four-year schools. For students who started at four-year institutions, Clearinghouse records had to show that they were enrolled at least one term with an intensity of half-time or higher. For students who started at two-year institutions, they had to either be enrolled for at least one term full time before August 10, 2018, be enrolled three-quarter time for at least one term or half time for any two terms for any two terms before December 31, 2018.

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<sup>30</sup> Students who began at multistate four-year nonprofit institutions were excluded from the results summarized in this section.

The students in this study were classified as exclusively full-time students, exclusively part-time students, or mixed enrollment students. Mixed enrollment students were those who showed a combination of full-time and part-time enrollments across the terms during the study period. (Enrollments during summer terms and shorter terms lasting less than 21 days were excluded from consideration.) For students enrolled concurrently at more than one institution, the two highest-intensity enrollment records were combined. So, if a student was concurrently enrolled half time at two institutions, that student was categorized as full time for that term.

Students were also divided into three groups based on the age of the students when they first entered college (20 or younger, 21 to 24, and 25 or older). Finally, student outcomes were analyzed by gender.

### **Reported Student Outcomes**

The six-year student outcomes calculated and compared in the National Student Clearinghouse study are as follows:

Total completion rate: The percentage of the cohort who received diplomas or certificates from any institution in the United States by the end of the defined six-year period.

Starting institution completion rate: The percentage of the cohort who received degrees or certificates from the same institution where they enrolled as first-time freshmen.

Other institutions completion rates: The percentage of the cohort who received degrees or certificates from institutions anywhere in the United States to which they had transferred. This rate is reported separately for the two-year and four-year schools where the students did not initially enroll as first-time freshmen.

Persistence rate: The percentage of students in a cohort who did not earn a degree or other academic award but were still enrolled in college during the last year of the study period.

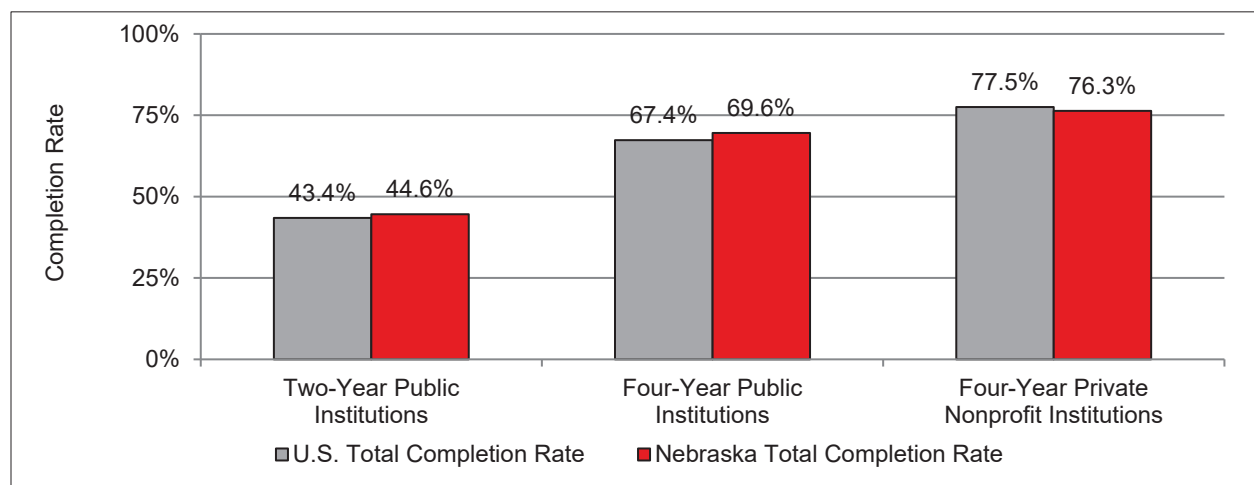
Percentage of students not enrolled: The percentage of the cohort who had not completed degrees or certificate programs and were not enrolled at any institution during the last year of the study period.

## **Nebraska Completion and Persistence Rates Compared to National Rates**

- [Figure 2.3.1](#) shows how the total completion rates for Nebraska institutions compared to the national rates for two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions.
- Total completion rates for degree-seeking, first-time freshmen at Nebraska’s two-year and four-year public institutions were both higher than the comparable national rates.
- The total completion rate for Nebraska’s four-year private nonprofit institutions was lower than the national rate for similar institutions.

**Figure 2.3.1**

### **Six-Year Total Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**

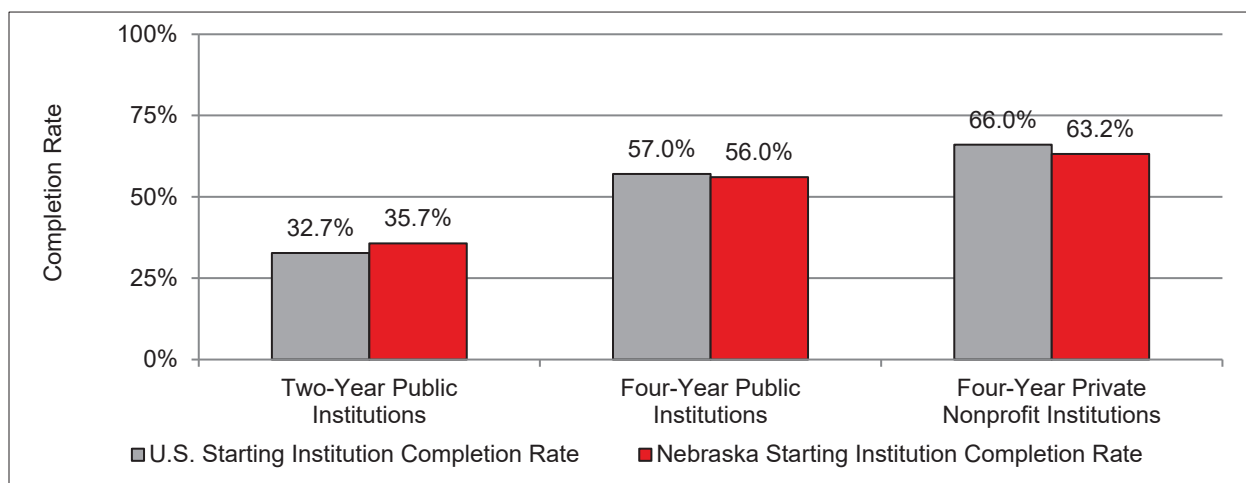


*Note.* See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.

- [Figure 2.3.2](#) compares the U.S. and Nebraska completion rates for students who received degrees or certificates from the same institutions where they initially enrolled as first-time freshmen.
- The completion rate for Nebraska’s two-year public institutions was higher than the comparable national rate. Nebraska’s completion rates for four-year public institutions and four-year private nonprofit institutions were lower than the corresponding national rates.

**Figure 2.3.2**

**Six-Year Starting Institution Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**

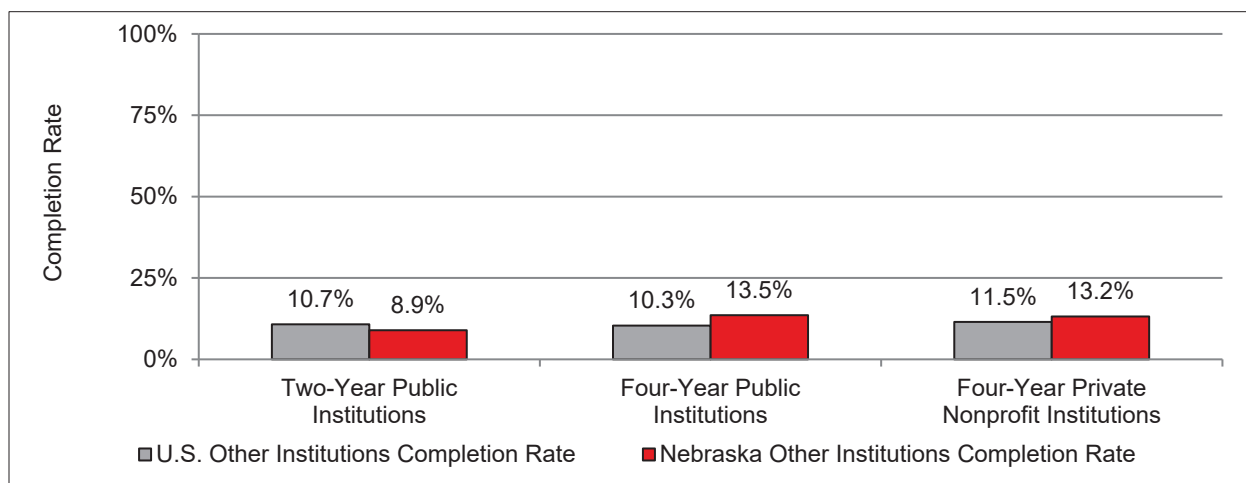


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.

- As shown in Figure 2.3.3, a notable percentage of freshmen started college at one institution and then transferred to another school where they completed a program of study.
- Approximately 9% to 14% of the first-time students at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions graduated from two-year or four-year schools to which they had transferred.
- Nebraska’s completion rates were higher than the comparable national rates for four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions.

**Figure 2.3.3**

**Six-Year “Other Institutions” Completion Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**

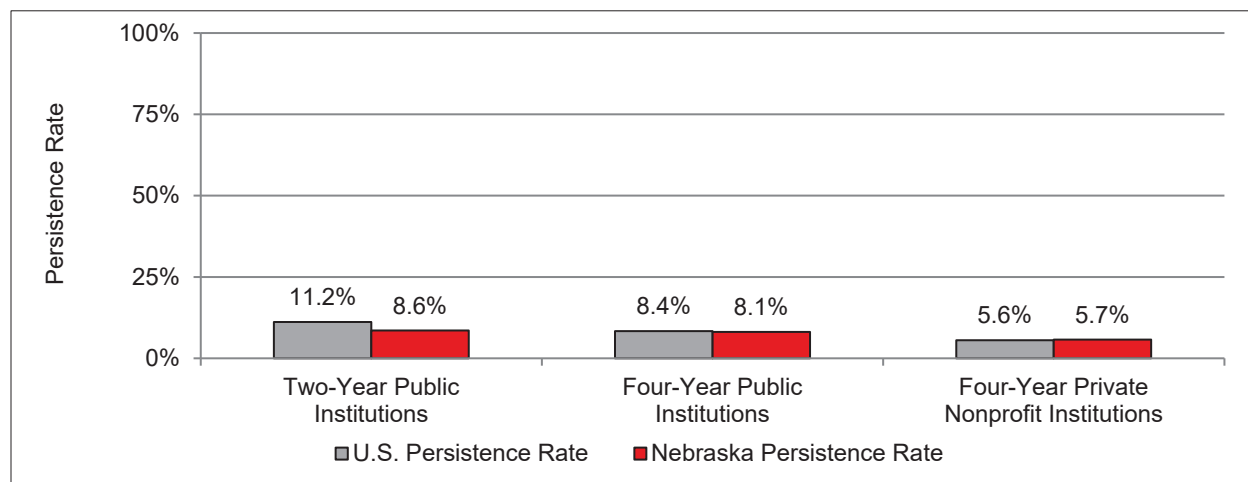


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.4](#), 6% to 9% of the students who started college at Nebraska’s public and private nonprofit institutions had not completed a degree or certificate program and were still enrolled at these or other institutions during the last year of the study period.
- Nebraska’s persistence rates for two-year and four-year public institutions were lower than the national persistence rate for similar institutions. However, Nebraska’s persistence rate for four-year private nonprofit institutions was higher than the reported national rate.

**Figure 2.3.4**

**Six-Year Persistence Rates for Nebraska and the United States for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**



*Note.* See [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#) for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.

**Nebraska Student Outcomes by Enrollment Status**

The findings of the National Student Clearinghouse study confirm that the completion rates of full-time students are significantly higher than for students who attend college only part-time. This study also reveals that the completion rates for students who start at two-year and four-year institutions who have combinations of full-time and part-time enrollment are higher than those for exclusively part-time students but lower than the rates for students who consistently go to college full time. In addition, this study confirms that part-time students are less likely to persist in their studies and more likely to drop out of college than exclusively full-time students.

**Student Outcomes Compared Within Each Sector**

- [Figure 2.3.5](#) shows that students who are exclusively part-time had total completion rates that were significantly lower than the completion rates for exclusively full-time students or mixed enrollment students.
- The six-year persistence rates (i.e., the percentage of students who had not completed a degree or certificate program but were still enrolled) were highest for the mixed enrollment students, regardless of the type of institution where they enrolled as first-time freshmen.
- The percentage of students who were no longer enrolled six years after they started college was significantly higher for exclusively part-time students than for exclusively full-time students or mixed enrollment students.

**Figure 2.3.5**

**Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Student Enrollment Status for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**



*Note.* See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.

### **Nebraska Student Outcomes by Age Group**

- As shown in [Figure 2.3.6](#), students who started college at two-year public institutions or four-year private nonprofit institutions when they were age 20 or younger were more likely to complete degrees or certificate programs than students who didn't start college until they were over the age of 20.
- The highest total completion rates for students age 20 or younger and students age 21 through 24 were at the four-year private nonprofit schools (77.4% and 57.0%, respectively). Meanwhile, the highest total completion rate for students age 25 or older was at four-year public institutions (70.5%).

### **Nebraska Student Outcomes by Gender**

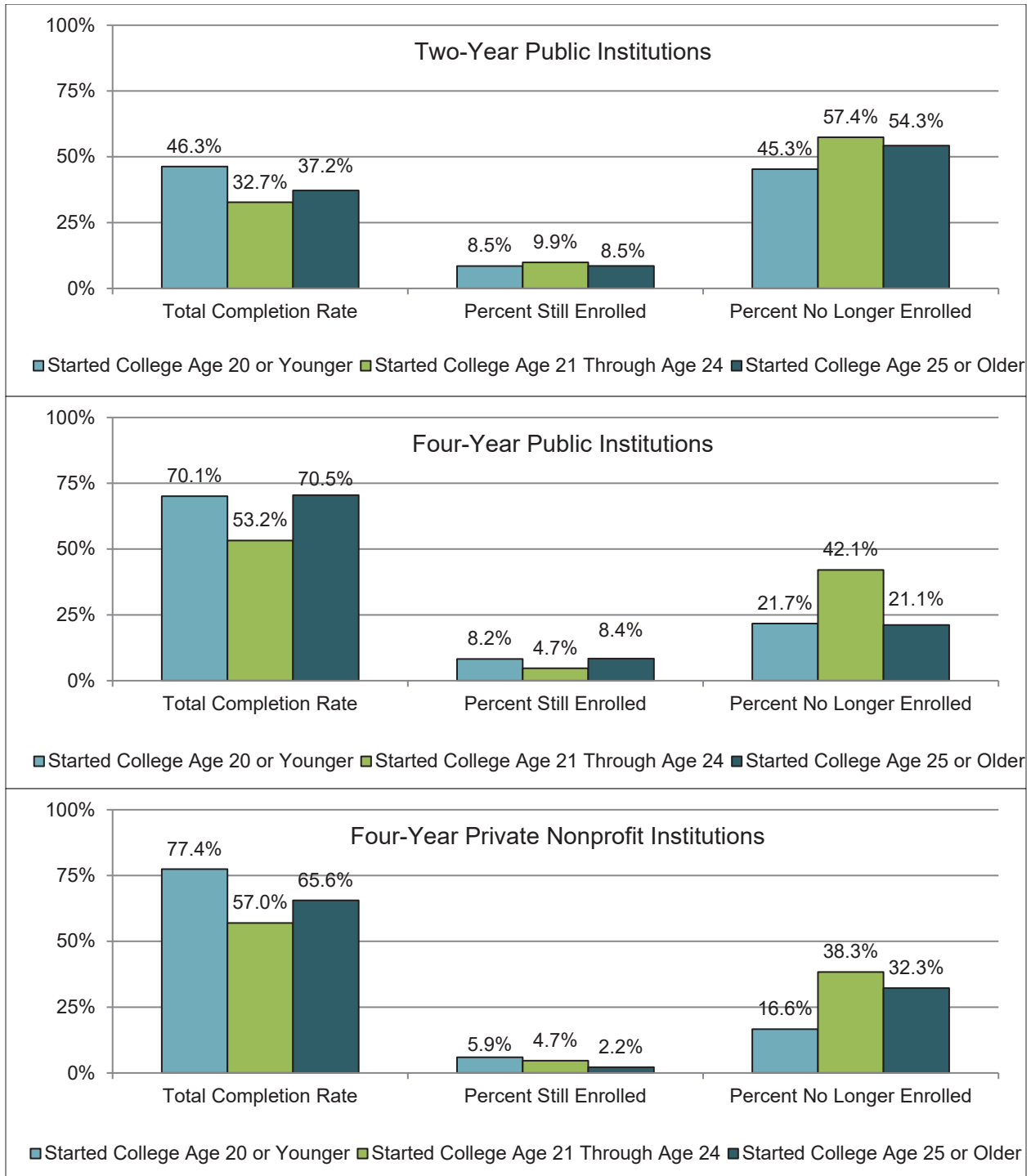
- As shown in [Figure 2.3.7](#), males were more likely than females to have completed degrees or certificate programs within the two-year public sector. However, females were more likely than males to have graduated within six years from four-year public and four-year private nonprofit institutions.
- Across all sectors, the percentages of female students who left college before degree completion were lower than the percentages of male students who dropped out of college. However, at the four-year public institutions, the persistence rates of students who did not earn a degree or certificate within six years were similar for males and females.

### **Conclusion**

All of the six-year student outcomes for the United States as a whole and for Nebraska's public and private nonprofit institutions are presented in [Table A12.2](#) in [Appendix 12](#). When the national percentages are compared to Nebraska's percentages, Nebraska's outcomes are higher, lower, or about the same as the comparable national rates, depending on the type of institution and the specific student enrollment or age group that was analyzed.

This study clearly shows that students who start college earlier and attend full time are much more likely to earn degrees and certificates. While this study is not without limitations, it does provide reasonable estimates of the six-year completion and persistence rates for Nebraska's two-year public institutions, four-year public institutions, and four-year private nonprofit institutions, compared to national rates.

**Figure 2.3.6**  
**Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Age Group**  
**for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**

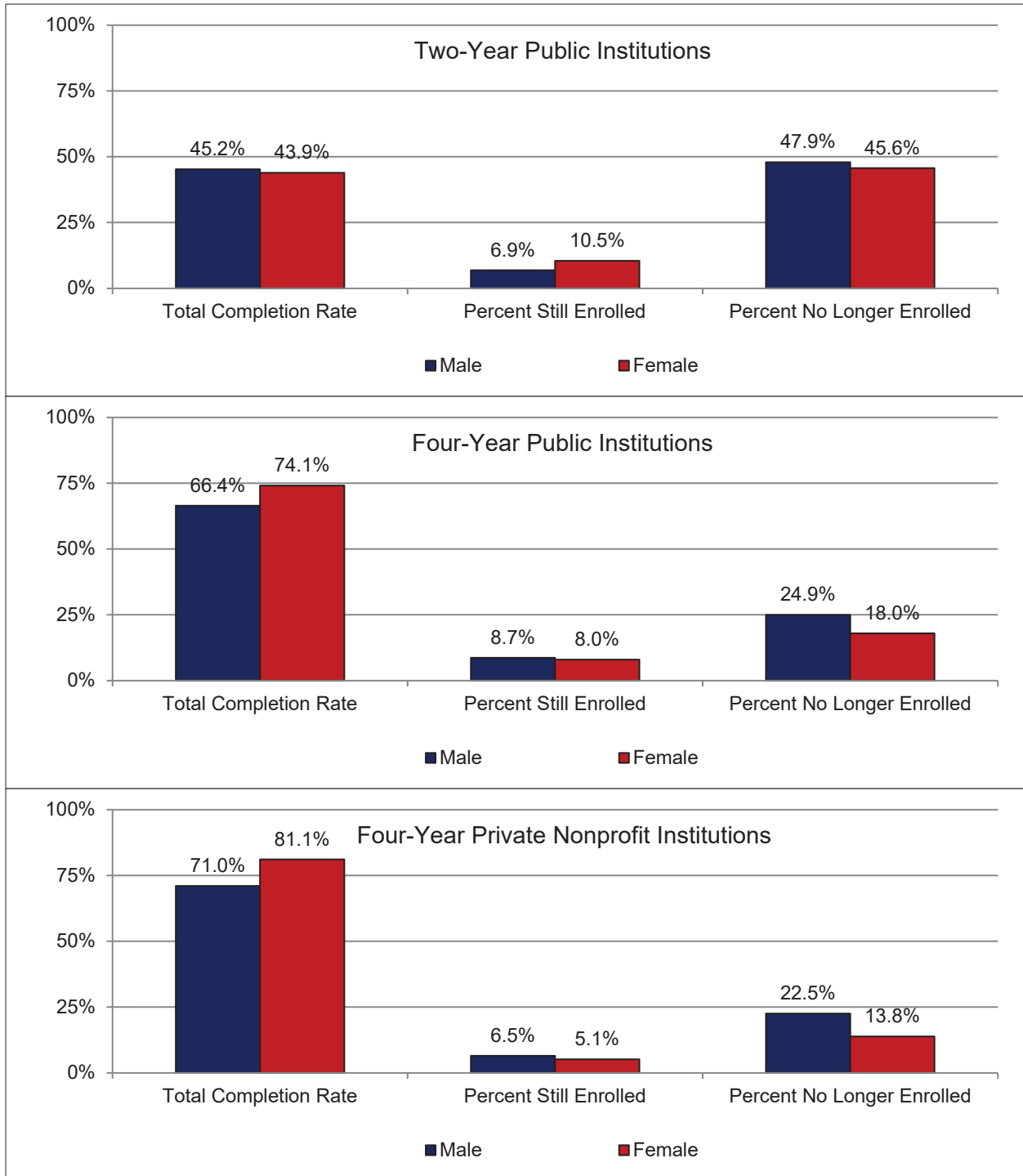


Note. See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.



**Figure 2.3.7**

**Nebraska Six-Year Student Outcomes by Sector and Gender for Degree-Seeking, First-Time Freshmen (Fall 2017)**



*Note.* See Table A12.2 in Appendix 12 for supporting data. Data source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, *Completing College: National and State Report with Longitudinal Data Dashboard on Six- and Eight-Year Completion Rates* (Signature Report 22), published November 2023.