



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Because Native Americans (both American Indians and Alaska Natives) comprise only 1% of the U.S. undergraduate population and less than 1% of the graduate population, these students are often left out of postsecondary research and data reporting due to small sample size. What data is available indicates that only 16% of Native Americans attain a bachelor's degree or higher and only 9% attain associate degrees, making the case for a system that is more responsive to the specific needs of these students.

### ENROLLMENT

- 19% of 18–24-year-old Native American students are enrolled in college compared to 41% of the overall U.S. population.
- Undergraduate enrollment among Native Americans aged 18 to 24 decreased from 128,600 in 2016–17 to 120,200 in 2018–19. Postbaccalaureate enrollment decreased from 13,700 in 2016–17 to 13,600 in 2018–19.
- Native American students are more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.
  - 79% of Native American students attended public two- or four-year institutions in 2018.
- 78% of all students at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) in 2016 were considered Native American, a percentage that has increased annually.
  - 89.5% of all Native American college students attended a TCU in the fall of 2018.

### COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- Completion rates for Native American students differ from those of students overall.
  - 41% of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2012 graduated within six years, compared to 62% for all students.
- In 2019, 25% of Native Americans over the age of 25 had an associate degree or higher, compared to 42% of all those over the age of 25.
  - Between 2010 and 2019, the percentage of Native Americans aged 25 to 29 who had attained at least an associate degree increased from 21% to 25%.

## CHALLENGES

- Native American students are often excluded from postsecondary data and research due to their small sample size.
- Native American students are more likely to need and receive grant aid assistance than other students, but less likely to take out student loans.
  - In 2015–16, 90% of Native American students received some type of grant aid, compared with 77% of all students.
  - 31% of Native American undergraduate students take out a federal student loan, compared to 40% of all students.
- Native American students are less likely to have access to Advanced Placement or college prep courses in high school.
- Native American students are also less likely to have family members that have attended college.
  - In 2017, 21% of Native American children under 18 years of age lived in a household with a parent who completed a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 52% of white households.

## SOURCES

[The Condition of Education 2020](#). National Center of Education Statistics, May 2020.

[American Community Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, March 2020.

[Digest of Education Statistics](#). National Center for Education Statistics.

[Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education](#). American Council on Education, 2019.

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[For Native Students, a Deepening Divide](#). The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 2016.

[Tribal Colleges and Universities](#). Department of Education.

[Creating Visibility and Healthy Learning Environments for Native Americans in Higher Education](#). American Indian College Fund, 2019.

[Graduation Rates & American Indian Education](#). Partnership with Native Americans, May 2017.

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