



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER (AAPI) STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students make up an incredibly diverse segment of the U.S. college population, but AAPI students are often left out of conversations about students of color and are seldom recognized in academic research. When AAPI students are included, they are often referred to as the “model minority,” a reference point against which other groups of students are compared. In reality, the AAPI umbrella represents over 50 different ethnic groups that vary greatly in terms of languages, English proficiency, colonial history, immigration patterns, and socioeconomic and first-generation college-going status. Given this diversity, it is not surprising that many AAPI ethnic subgroups are identified as underserved. However, without disaggregated data, it can be difficult to understand how these nuances can account for differentiated outcomes.

There is great variability in the Asian American population, which continues to grow every year. The rapidly increasing population has grown 30.6% since the 2010 Census and 10% from 2010 to 2013 alone. According to the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), of the approximately 22.6 million Asian Americans, the largest ethnic groups were Chinese (5.2 million), Asian Indian (4.5 million), and Filipino (4.1 million). Together they comprised approximately 61% of the Asian American population. Other East Asian groups like Korean and Japanese comprised another 15% of the population. The newer wave of Asian immigrants and refugees, the Southeast Asians, which include Vietnamese, Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian groups, comprised another 13% of the population. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander groups made up less than 1% of the U.S. population.

ENROLLMENT/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- AAPI college enrollment has increased by 36% since the 2000–01 academic year.
 - In the 2018–2019 academic year, the largest representation of AAPI students is at public four-year institutions, where they make up 8% of the student population. AAPI students comprise 6% of students at private non-profit four-year institutions and 5% at four-year for-profit institutions.
 - AAPI students comprise 6% of students at public two-year institutions, 3% of students at private non-profit two-year institutions, and 5% at two-year for-profit institutions.
 - In fall 2018, Asian students accounted for 9% of graduate student enrollment at private non-profit institutions, 8% at public institutions, and 5% at private for-profit institutions.
- During the 2017–2018 academic year, Asian undergraduate students were more likely to graduate with a degree in a STEM field than any other demographic group.
- Thirteen percent of associate degrees and 35% of bachelor’s degrees conferred to Asian graduates were in a STEM field, higher than the percentage conferred to White students, Black students, American Indian/Alaska Native students, students of two or more races, and Hispanic students.

- According to the 2018 ACS, AAPI ethnic sub-groups have varying rates of degree attainment.
 - Twenty-two percent of Burmese, 26% of Laotian, 27% of Cambodian, and 28% of Pacific Islander adults over the age of 24 have completed an associate degree or higher.
 - Sixty-four percent of Japanese, 65% of Korean, and 80% of Asian Indian adults over the age of 24 have completed an associate degree or higher.
 - Overall, 62% of AAPI adults over the age of 24 have completed an associate degree or higher.

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Updated April 2021

