



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Because Native Americans (both American Indians and Alaska Natives) comprise less than 1% of both the U.S. undergraduate and graduate student population, these students are often left out of postsecondary research and data reporting due to small sample size. What data is available indicates that 20% of Native Americans attain a bachelor's degree or higher and 12% attain associate degrees, making the case for a system that is more responsive to the specific needs of these students.

ENROLLMENT

- 24% 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 116,400 in 2019–20. Postbaccalaureate enrollment decreased from 13,700 in 2016–17 to 13,400 in 2019–20.
- 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 2019.
- 86% of all students at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) in the 2017-18 academic year were Native American.

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 2013 graduated within six years, compared to 63% 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 over the age of 25 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, 88% of Native American students received some type of grant aid, compared with 77% of all students.
 - 38% of Native American undergraduate students take out a federal student loan, compared to 55% 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.

[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018](#). National Center for Education Statistics, July 2018.

[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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