Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Native American Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

According to the Census’ American Community Survey, in 2021, 1% of the total U.S. population identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Among American Indian or Alaskan Native residents aged 25 or over, only 16.8% had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. This rate is up from 13.4% in 2010, but falls short of the national rate of 35.7%.

ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2021, Native American students made up 0.7% of all postsecondary enrollment.
- In 2021, 28% of the 18–24-year-old Native American population were enrolled in college compared to 38% of the overall U.S. population.
- Since Fall 2010, Native American enrollment has declined from 196,000 to 121,000, a 38% decrease:
  - Undergraduate enrollment declined from 179,000 to 107,000, a 40% decrease
  - Graduate enrollment declined from 17,000 to 14,000, a nearly 18% decrease
- Native American students are much more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.
  - In Fall 2021, 77% of Native American students attended public institutions:
    - 45% attended public four-year institutions
    - 32% attended public two-year institutions
- Nearly 80% of the Fall 2021 enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) were Native American students.

FINANCIAL AID

- According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, 54% of Native American students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in the 2019-20 academic year, compared to 55% of all students.
  - 45% of Native American students received a Pell grant, compared to 40% of all students.
  - 26% of Native American students received a federal student loan, compared to 35% of all students.
- Among Native American students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount received was $6,985, which is the lowest of any racial/ethnic group.
  - The average Pell grant amount for Native American students was $4,144.
  - The average Federal student loan amount for Native American students was $6,908.

1 Terms used in this report reflect terms found in the data source material.
COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- **42%** of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2014 graduated within six years, compared to 64% for all students.
- At two-year institutions, Native American students tend to graduate within three years at a similar rate as other racial/ethnic groups, **31%** for Native American students compared to 35% overall.
- Of the more than two million bachelor’s degrees conferred in the 2020-21 academic year, 9,545 (0.5%) went to Native American students.

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- According to the Baccalaureate & Beyond study, ten years after receiving a bachelor’s degree, Native American graduates who reported having an income averaged a gross income of **$76,602**, similar to the national average of $76,370.
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income. Ten years after graduating:
  - **70%** of Native American graduates reported owning a home, compared to 63% of all graduates
  - **84%** of Native American graduates had some form of a retirement account, similar to the 87% of all graduates

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Native American students are often excluded from postsecondary data and research due to their small sample size.
- Native American students are less likely to enroll in 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 2021, 23% 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 56% of white children.
  - Native American children were the least likely out of all racial/ethnic groups to live in a household with a parent who has a bachelor’s degree or higher.

DATA SOURCES

American Indian College Fund, 2019.