



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)<sup>1</sup>

### HISTORY

TCUs, also known as tribally controlled colleges and universities (TCCUs), are [institutions of higher education](#) formally controlled, sanctioned, or chartered by the governing body of a Native American tribe or tribes where Native American culture, language, and tradition are fostered. After [nearly 400 years](#) of non-tribal control over tribal education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels, tribal leaders began a political movement known as self-determination in the 1960s. Dine College, founded in 1968 by the Navajo Nation, was the first TCU, leading to the establishment of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) in 1972. AIHEC established the American Indian College Fund in 1989 and was successful in working with congress to authorize land-grant status for all TCUs in 1994.

### FEDERAL FUNDING

- TCUs are federally funded under Title III, [Parts A and F](#) of the HEA and [Section 117](#) of the Career and Technical Education Act (CTEA).
  - Title III, Part A funding for FY24 was [\\$51.8M](#).
  - Title III, Part F funding for FY23 was \$28.3M.
  - CTEA Section 117 funding for FY23 was \$11.9M.

### INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

- In 2023, there were 35 TCUs in 13 different states, with Montana (7), North Dakota (5), and Minnesota (4) having the most institutions.
  - TCUs are largely located on tribal reservations in the Midwest and Southwest.
- Of the 35 TCUs, 18 were public four-year institutions, 12 were public two-year institutions, 4 were private non-profit four-year institutions, and 1 was a private non-profit two-year institution.
  - All TCUs are considered land-grant institutions.

### ENROLLMENT

- In fall 2023, TCUs enrolled 18,928 total students: 18,621 undergraduates and 307 graduate students.

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<sup>1</sup> Data are based on the author's calculations of IPEDS and FSA unless otherwise cited or specified. Only degree-granting and Title IV participating institutions are included. Code and data available upon request.

- 15,020 (79.4%) of the total enrollment at TCUs identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN).<sup>2</sup>
- Total fall enrollment at TCUs increased from 18,264 in 2013 to 18,928 in 2023, a 3.6% increase.
  - Non-TCU enrollment increased at a slower rate during the same time period, rising from 19.5 million in 2013 to 19.6 million in 2023, a 0.4% increase.
- In 2023, 11.9% of all AIAN students in the U.S. were enrolled in TCUs.
  - This is up from 9.7% of all AIAN students enrolled in TCUs in 2013.

## FINANCIAL AID

- According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, [62.3%](#) of TCU students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in the 2019-20 academic year, compared to 54.9% of all students.<sup>3</sup>
  - [55.8%](#) of TCU students received a Pell grant, compared to 40.2% of all students.
  - [17.3%](#) of TCU students received a federal student loan, compared to 34.5% of all students.
- Among TCU students who received federal Title IV aid, the [average amount](#) received was \$8,890.
  - The average Pell grant amount for TCU students was \$4,520.
  - The average Federal student loan amount for TCU students was \$9,698.

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- At TCUs, 20.7% of students graduated within 150% time.<sup>4</sup>
- At TCUs, 20.2% of AIAN students graduated within 150% time.
- TCUs conferred 1,484 associate's degrees, 420 bachelor's degrees, and 57 graduate degrees in the 2022-23 academic year.
  - TCUs conferred 377 bachelor's degrees to AIAN graduates, representing 4.5% of all bachelor's degrees conferred to AIAN graduates in 2022-23.

## DATA SOURCES

[Center for MSIs](#). Rutgers University. 2015.

[Fast Facts](#). U.S. Department of Education. March 2024.

[Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics. September 2024.

[National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

[U.S. Department of Education Program Data](#). February 2025.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "American Indian or Alaska Native" is used to encompass all Native American tribal affiliations and is based on the U.S. Census designation.

<sup>3</sup> All National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys [combine TCUs](#) with "American-Indian Serving" institutions due to small sample sizes, which include non-TCU institutions that enroll at least 25% AIAN students. There are nine non-TCU institutions included alongside the 35 TCUs.

<sup>4</sup> 150% time represents a six-year graduation rate for four-year institutions and a three-year graduation rate for two-year institutions for first-time, full-time students. Four-year institution counts only include bachelor's degree seeking cohorts.