



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Veteran Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

According to the U.S. Census' American Community Survey (ACS), in 2023 [6.1%](#) of the population aged 18 and over were veterans of the U.S. military. Of those veterans, 28% served September 2001 or later, 24.8% served between August 1990 and September 2001, 33% are veterans of the Vietnam War era, 3.5% were veterans of the Korean War era, and 0.6% were veterans of World War II. Females constitute 10.9% of veterans. White non-Hispanic people were the most represented racial/ethnic group among veterans at 74.1%, compared to 12.6% Black or African American, 8.6% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 7.5% reporting two or more races, and 2.8% reporting a race/ethnicity not listed. For individuals aged 25 or over, 32.4% of veterans held a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 36.4% of nonveterans.

ENROLLMENT

Unless otherwise noted, enrollment data in this section come from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), academic year 2019-20.

- [3.7%](#) of undergraduates were veterans.
 - 2.8% of public 4-year, 2.9% of private nonprofit 4-year, 4.3% of public 2-year, and 7.5% of for-profit institution enrollments were veterans.
- Veteran students were [twice as likely](#) to attend for-profit institutions and slightly more likely to attend public 2-year institutions than the national average.
 - 12.6% of veterans attended for-profit institutions, compared to 6.2% of all students
 - 33.7% attended public 2-year institutions, compared to 29.3% of all students
- [3.8%](#) of students enrolled at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) were veterans, while 3.6% of students enrolled at non-MSIs were veterans.
 - While [1%](#) of veteran students enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), a similar rate as nonveterans, 15.5% of veterans attended Black-serving non-HBCU institutions compared to 9.5% of nonveteran students.
- [63%](#) of veteran students were aged 30 or older, compared to 19% of non-veteran students.
- [7.5%](#) of Native American, 4.4% of students reporting more than one race, 4.6% of Black, 4.2% of white, 3.8% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2.4% of Hispanic or Latino, and 1.7% of Asian students were veterans.

FINANCIAL AID

- According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 492,136 students received Post-9/11 GI Bill Financial Benefits, while 226,441 students received Department of Defense (DOD) Tuition Assistance Program benefits in the 2021-22 academic year.¹
 - The average Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit was \$10,358 and the average DOD Tuition Assistance was \$2,169.

¹ Students may qualify for both programs, so there is likely overlap. These figures were calculated by the authors.

- According to the NPSAS, [44.3%](#) of veteran students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in the 2019-20 academic year other than GI Bill or DOD benefits, compared to 55.4% of nonveteran students.
 - A [similar share](#) of veteran and nonveteran students received a Pell grant (38.2% vs. 40.3%).
 - [20.9%](#) of veteran students received a federal student loan, compared to 35% of nonveteran students.
- Among veteran students who received federal Title IV aid, the [average amount](#) of all federal aid received was \$7,394, compared to \$8,761 for nonveteran students.
 - The average Pell grant amount was \$3,904 for veteran students, compared to \$4,128 for nonveteran students.
 - The average Federal student loan amount for veteran students was \$8,026, compared to \$8,574 for nonveteran students.

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- According to the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) study, among students who first enrolled in the 2011-12 academic year, [16.9%](#) of veteran students had attained a bachelor's degree by 2017, compared to 37.1% of nonveteran students.
 - 52% of veteran students had attained no degree or certificate, compared to 43.7% of non-veteran students
- Among all students who had attained a bachelor's degree by 2017, [less than 1%](#) were veteran students.

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- According to the Baccalaureate & Beyond study, ten years after receiving a bachelor's degree, veteran graduates who reported having an income averaged a gross income of [\\$79,371](#), compared to the average of \$76,293 for nonveteran students.
- Wealth accumulation can be [measured](#) differently from income. Ten years after graduating:
 - [73.7%](#) of veteran graduates reported owning a home, compared to 62.4% of nonveteran graduates
 - [87.3%](#) of veteran graduates had some form of a retirement account, similar to non-veteran graduates

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- In 2013, student veterans [reported](#) investing less time outside of the classroom on activities not essential to the completion of their coursework due to parenting responsibilities or work.

DATA SOURCES

[American Community Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, February 2025.

[Baccalaureate & Beyond Survey](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

[Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

[Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics. February 2025.

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

[American Council on Education](#). December 2013.