



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Native American Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2023, one percent of the total U.S. population identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native.*¹ Among American Indian or Alaskan Native residents aged 25 or over, 16.8% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.¹ This rate is up from 13.9% in 2013, but falls short of the 2023 national rate of 36.2%.¹

ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2022, Native American students made up 0.7% of all postsecondary enrollment.⁴
- In 2022, 25.8% of the 18–24-year-old Native American population were enrolled in college compared to 39% of the overall U.S. population.⁴
- From Fall 2010 to Fall 2022, Native American enrollment has declined from 196,200 to 121,100, a 38% decrease.⁴
 - Undergraduate enrollment declined from 179,000 to 107,000, a 40% decrease.⁴
 - Graduate enrollment declined from 17,000 to 14,000, a nearly 18% decrease.⁴
- Native American students are much more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.
 - In Fall 2022, 77.4% of Native American students attended public institutions:
 - 44.3% attended public four-year institutions.⁴
 - 33.0% attended public two-year institutions.⁴
- 78.3% of the Fall 2022 enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) were Native American students.⁴

FINANCIAL AID

- Fifty-four percent 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.⁵
 - 45% of Native American students received a Pell Grant, compared to 40% of all students.⁵
 - 26% of Native American students received a federal student loan, compared to 35% of all students.⁵
- 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.⁵
 - The average Pell Grant amount for Native American students was \$4,144.⁵
 - The average federal student loan amount for Native American students was \$6,908.⁵

* Terms used in this report reflect terms found in the data source material.

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- Forty-four percent of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2016 graduated within six years, compared to 64.6% for all students.⁴
- At two-year institutions, Native American students tend to graduate within three years at a similar rate as other racial/ethnic groups, 28.5% for Native American students compared to 34.1% overall in the 2019 cohort.⁴
- Of the more than two million bachelor's degrees conferred in the 2021-22 academic year, 9,542 (0.5%) went to Native American students.⁴

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- 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 \$76,370.²
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.⁷ Ten years after graduating:
 - 70% of Native American graduates reported owning a home, compared to 63% of all graduates.²
 - 84% of Native American graduates had some form of a retirement account, similar to the 87% of all graduates.²

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Native American students are often excluded from postsecondary data and research due to their small sample size.³
- Native American students are less likely to enroll in Advanced Placement or college prep courses in high school.⁶
- Native American students are also less likely to have family members that have attended college.
 - In 2022, 25.9% 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.⁴
 - 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.⁴

DATA SOURCES

¹ [American Community Survey & Current Population Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, April 2025.

² [Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

³ [Creating Visibility and Healthy Learning Environments for Native Americans in Higher Education](#). American Indian College Fund, 2019.

⁴ [Digest of Education Statistics](#). National Center for Education Statistics, April 2025.

⁵ [National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

⁶ [Office of Civil Rights](#). Department of Education, October 2022.

⁷ [Wealth Analysis FAQ](#). Urban Institute, 2021.