



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Women in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2023, 50.5% of the total U.S. population were female.*¹ Among females aged 25 or over, 37.4% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.¹ This rate is up from 29.7% in 2013 and is 2.6 percentage points higher than the rate for males.¹

ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2022, female students made up 57.9% of all postsecondary enrollment.⁴
 - White female students made up 28.4% of all postsecondary enrollment, while Hispanic or Latina female students made up 12.2%, Black female students made up 8%, Asian female students made up 4%, female students of two or more races made up 2.4%, non-resident female students made up 2.4%, American Indian/Alaska Native female students made up 0.4%, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander female students made up 0.1%.⁴
- In 2022, 43.8% of the 18–24-year-old female population were enrolled in college compared to 34.2% of the male population.⁴
- Since Fall 2012, overall female student enrollment has declined from 11.73 million to 10.77 million, an 8.2% decrease:
 - Undergraduate female enrollment declined from 10.02 million to 8.82 million, an 11.9% decrease.⁴
 - Despite the overall enrollment decline, graduate enrollment for female students increased from 1.71 million to 1.94 million, a 13.9% increase.⁴
- Female students are more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.⁴
 - In Fall 2022, 71.4% of female students attended public institutions:
 - 47.6% attended public four-year institutions.⁴
 - 23.8% attended public two-year institutions.⁴

FINANCIAL AID AND STUDENT DEBT

- In the 2019–20 academic year, 59% of female students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid compared to 49% of male students.⁶
 - 45% of female students received a Pell Grant, compared to 34% of male students.⁶
 - 37% of female students received a federal student loan, compared to 31% of male students.⁶
- Among female students who received federal Title IV aid in 2019–20, the average amount received was \$8,744.⁶
 - The average Pell Grant amount for female students was \$4,123.⁶
 - The average federal loan amount for female students was \$8,477.⁶

* Woman and female will both be used in this fact sheet, depending on the terminology of the source.

- Women bachelor's degree recipients who were first-generation college students borrowed, on average, \$4,145 more in total cumulative loans than women bachelor's degree recipients whose parents held a bachelor's degree.³
- Outstanding student loan balances are disproportionately held by women.³
 - As of 2020, women held nearly two-thirds of outstanding student loan debt, totalling more than \$929 million.³
 - Black women held over \$41,000, Pacific Islander/Hawaiian women held over \$38,000, American Indian/Alaska Native women held over \$36,000, white women held over \$33,000, Hispanic women held over \$29,000, and Asian women held over \$27,000 in debt.³

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 67.6% of first-time, full-time female students attending four-year institutions graduated within six years, compared to 61.1% of male students.⁴
- At two-year institutions, among first-time, full-time students, 35.7% of female students graduated within three years, compared to 32.3% of male students.⁴
- Of the more than two million bachelor's degrees conferred in the 2021–22 academic year, 1,179,719 (58.5%) went to female students.⁴

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- Ten years after receiving a bachelor's degree, female graduates reported having an average gross income of \$66,445, compared to \$89,204 for male graduates.²
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.⁷ Ten years after graduating:
 - 63% of female graduates reported owning a home, compared to 62% of male graduates.²
 - 86% of female graduates had some form of a retirement account, compared to 87% of male graduates.²

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Female students were more than three times as likely (15% versus 4%) to be single parents as male students.⁶
 - Despite the growth of student parents in higher education, campuses that provide childcare are declining, particularly among community colleges. Less than half of all public institutions offered childcare in 2019.⁵

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 [Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans](#). The American Association of University Women, 2021.

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

⁵ [Evaluating the Role of Campus Child Care in Student Parent Success](#). The Institute for Women's Policy Research, October 2021.

⁶ [National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

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