



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)*

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.⁷ 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.⁴ 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 successfully worked 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).^{5,6}
 - Title III, Part A funding for FY24 was \$51.5M.¹
 - Title III, Part F funding for FY24 was \$28.3M.⁵
 - CTEA Section 117 funding for FY24 was \$12.0M.¹

INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

- In 2025, there were 35 TCUs in 13 different states, with Montana (7), North Dakota (5), and Minnesota (4) having the most institutions.²
 - TCUs are largely located on tribal reservations in the Midwest and Southwest.²
- 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.²
 - All TCUs are considered land-grant institutions.²

ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2024, TCUs enrolled 18,935 total students: 18,598 undergraduates and 337 graduate students.²
 - 14,869 (78.5%) of the total enrollment at TCUs identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN).²
- Total fall enrollment at TCUs increased from 17,879 in 2014 to 18,935 in 2024, a 5.9% increase.²
 - Non-TCU enrollment increased at a slower rate during the same time period, rising from 19.3 million in 2014 to 19.7 million in 2024, a 1.9% increase.²

* 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.

- In 2024, 11.9% of all AIAN students in the U.S. were enrolled in TCUs.²
 - This is up from 10.2% of all AIAN students enrolled in TCUs in 2014.²

FINANCIAL AID

- 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.³
 - 55.8% of TCU students received a Pell grant, compared to 40.2% of all students.³
 - 17.3% of TCU students received a federal student loan, compared to 34.5% of all students.³
- Among TCU students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount received was \$5,837.
 - The average Pell grant amount for TCU students was \$4,233.
 - The average Federal student loan amount for TCU students was \$6,255.

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- In 2023, 26.4% of students at TCUs graduated within 150% time, compared to 61% of students at all Title IV institutions in the United States.
 - At TCUs, 20.9% of AIAN students graduated within 150% time.
- TCUs conferred 1,605 associate's degrees, 497 bachelor's degrees, and 103 graduate degrees in the 2023-24 academic year.
 - TCUs conferred 444 bachelor's degrees to AIAN graduates, representing 5.9% of all bachelor's degrees conferred to AIAN graduates in 2023-24.

DATA SOURCES

¹[Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Summary](#). U.S. Department of Education. March 2024.

²[Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics. September 2024.

³[National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

⁴[Redefining Success](#). Penn GSE Center for MSIs.

⁵[Title III Part A Programs](#). U.S. Department of Education. January 2026.

⁶[Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Education Program](#). U.S. Department of Education. January 2026.

⁷[White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities](#). Executive Office of the President. October 2021.