



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Native American Students in Higher Education\*

### CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2024, 1% of the total U.S. population identified as American Indian or Alaska Native.<sup>1</sup> Among American Indian or Alaskan Native residents aged 25 or over, 17.2% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>1</sup> This rate is up from 13.9% in 2014, but falls short of the 2024 national rate of 36.8%.<sup>1</sup>

### ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2024, Native American students made up 0.6% of all postsecondary enrollment.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- From Fall 2014 to Fall 2024, Native American enrollment decreased by 15.4% from 145,900 to 123,500.<sup>4</sup>
  - Undergraduate enrollment decreased from 132,800 to 110,300, a 16.9% decrease.<sup>4</sup>
  - Graduate enrollment increased from 13,120 to 13,210, a 0.7% increase.<sup>4</sup>
- Native American students are much more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.
  - In Fall 2024, 78% of Native American students attended public institutions:
    - 49.3% attended public four-year institutions.<sup>4</sup>
    - 28.8% attended public two-year institutions.<sup>4</sup>
- 78.3% of the Fall 2022 enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) identified as Native American.<sup>3</sup>

### FINANCIAL AID

- 54% of Native American students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in 2019-20, compared to 55% of all students.<sup>5</sup>
  - 45% of Native American students received a Pell Grant, compared to 40% of all students.<sup>5</sup>
  - 26% of Native American students received federal student loans, compared to 35% of all students.<sup>5</sup>
- Among Native American students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount was \$6,985, the lowest among racial/ethnic groups.<sup>5</sup>
  - The average Pell Grant amount for Native American students was \$4,144.<sup>5</sup>
  - The average federal student loan amount for Native American students was \$6,908.<sup>5</sup>

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

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 37.8% of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2018 graduated within six years, compared to 61% for all students.<sup>4</sup>
- At two-year institutions, 38.7% of Native American students who began attending in 2021 graduated within 3 years, compared to 41.1% of students overall.<sup>4</sup>
- Of the nearly two million bachelor's degrees conferred in 2023-24, 8,008 (0.4%) went to Native American students.<sup>4</sup>

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

## POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Native American students are less likely to enroll in Advanced Placement or college preparatory courses in high school.<sup>6</sup>
- Native American students are also less likely to have family members who 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.<sup>3</sup>
  - 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.<sup>3</sup>

## DATA SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> [American Community Survey & Current Population Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, January 2026.

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

<sup>3</sup> [Digest of Education Statistics](#). National Center for Education Statistics, December 2025.

<sup>4</sup> [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics, January 2026.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> [Wealth Analysis FAQ](#). Urban Institute, 2021.