



Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2024, 13.7% of the civilian population reported having some form of disability.² There are considerable differences in disability reporting by race/ethnicity, with American Indian and Alaska Native (16.1%), Black (15.3%), and non-Hispanic White (14.9%) populations the most likely to report having a disability.² Asian (8.6%) respondents were the least likely to report having a disability.² Among the 39.2 million people who are 25 or older and report having a disability, 8.7 million (22.2%) held a bachelor's degree or higher in 2024, up from 15.6% in 2014.² However, this is considerably lower than the rate of 40.3% among the population of 195 million people who did not report a disability in 2024.²

ENROLLMENT

The National Center for Education Statistics defines students with disabilities as those who report deafness or serious difficulty hearing; blindness or serious difficulty seeing; serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition; or serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.⁷

- In 2019-20, the following groups reported having a disability:
 - 21% of all enrolled undergraduates and 11% of all enrolled graduate students.⁶
 - 28% of undergraduate student veterans and 20% of graduate student veterans.⁶
 - 24% of American Indian or Alaska Native, 23% of Pacific Islander, 21% of White, 22% of Hispanic, 18% of Black, and 14% of Asian undergraduates.⁶
- There is a discrepancy between the rate of students reporting having a disability and the rate of students registering with their campus disability center.⁶
 - In 2019-20, 8% of students registered with their institution as having a disability.⁶
 - This rate was 10% at non-profit institutions, 7% at for-profit institutions, and 7% of students at public institutions.⁶

FINANCIAL AID

- 58% of students who reported having a disability received some form of Title IV financial aid in 2019-20, compared to 54% of students who did not report having a disability.⁶
 - 45% of students with a disability received a Pell Grant, compared to 39% of students who did not report having a disability.⁶
 - 36% of students with a disability received a federal student loan, a rate similar to that for all students.⁶
- Among students with a disability who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount received was \$8,499, and \$8,782 for students without a disability.⁶
 - The average Pell Grant amount for students with a disability was \$4,035.⁶
 - The average federal student loan amount for students with a disability was \$8,181.⁶

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 23% of undergraduates who reported having a disability in 2012 graduated with a bachelor's degree by 2017, compared to 38% of undergraduates who did not report a disability.⁴

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- Ten years after receiving a bachelor's degree, graduates with a disability who reported having an income averaged a gross income of \$69,064, compared to an average gross income of \$77,008 for graduates who did not report a disability.³
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.⁹ Ten years after graduating:
 - 55% of graduates with a disability and 63% of graduates without a disability reported owning a home.³
 - 80% of graduates with a disability and 87% of graduates without a disability had a retirement account.³

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Students with disabilities identified these barriers to access and participation on campus:
 - Being unaware of their campus disability resource office and its services, challenges navigating campus procedures, and inadequate accommodations.¹
 - Classroom and instructional environment barriers include faculty unaware of disability accommodations, faculty who resist accommodations, and instructors who fail to respond to requests for accommodations.¹
 - Campus access and support issues, including uneven, poorly marked walkways, buildings with external stairs but no ramp, and gaps in programs and services.¹
 - Students with disabilities were less likely to feel welcome on campus or supported by their institution than students without disabilities.⁸
- 70% of students with mental health disabilities were not registered to receive accommodations on campus.⁵
 - One-third of students with mental health disabilities stated they were not aware they were eligible for accommodations.⁵

DATA SOURCES

¹ [Access & Participation in Higher Education](#). National Center for College Students with Disabilities, April 2019.

² [American Community Survey & Current Population Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, January 2026.

³ [Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

⁴ [Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

⁵ [Inaccessible Accessibility](#). Mental Health America, 2021

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

⁷ [Students With Disabilities: Fast Facts](#). National Center for Education Statistics, December 2023.

⁸ [Supporting Undergraduate Students with Disabilities](#). National Center for College Students with Disabilities, June 2021.

⁹ [Wealth Analysis FAQ](#). Urban Institute, 2021.