



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Women in Higher Education

### CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2024, 50.5% of the total U.S. population was female.\*<sup>1</sup> Among females aged 25 or over, 38.3% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>1</sup> This rate is up from 30.2% in 2014 and is 2.9 percentage points higher than the rate for males.<sup>1</sup>

### ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2023, female students made up 57.6% of all postsecondary enrollment.<sup>4</sup>
  - White female students accounted for 27.6% of all postsecondary enrollment, followed by Hispanic or Latina (12.5%), Black (8.1%), Asian (4%), American Indian/Alaska Native (0.4%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students (0.1%).<sup>4</sup>
- In 2022, 43.8% of the 18–24-year-old female population were enrolled in college compared to 34.2% of the male population.<sup>4</sup>
- Between Fall 2014 and Fall 2024, overall female student enrollment grew from 10.86 million to 11.34 million, a 4.4% increase:
  - Undergraduate female enrollment grew from 9.3 million to 9.46 million, a 1.7% increase.<sup>6</sup>
  - Graduate enrollment for female students increased from 1.56 million to 1.87 million, a 19.9% increase.<sup>6</sup>
- Female students are more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education.<sup>4</sup>
  - In Fall 2022, 71.4% of female students attended public institutions:
    - 47.6% attended public four-year institutions.<sup>4</sup>
    - 23.8% attended public two-year institutions.<sup>4</sup>

### FINANCIAL AID AND STUDENT DEBT

- In 2019–20, 59.3% of female students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid compared to 48.7% of male students.<sup>7</sup>
  - 44.6% of female students received a Pell Grant, compared to 34.2% of male students.<sup>7</sup>
  - 37.3% of female students received a federal student loan, compared to 30.7% of male students.<sup>7</sup>
- Among female students who received federal Title IV aid in 2019–20, the average amount received was \$8,744.<sup>7</sup>
  - The average Pell Grant amount for female students was \$4,123.<sup>7</sup>
  - The average federal loan amount for female students was \$8,477.<sup>7</sup>
- Outstanding student loan balances are disproportionately held by women.<sup>3</sup>
  - As of 2020, women held nearly two-thirds of outstanding student loan debt, totalling more than \$929 million.<sup>3</sup>
  - Average student loan debt was highest among Black women (over \$41,000), followed by Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian women (over \$38,000), American Indian or Alaska Native women (over \$36,000), White women (over \$33,000), Hispanic women (over \$29,000), and Asian women (over \$27,000).<sup>3</sup>

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

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 67.5% of first-time, full-time female students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2017 graduated within six years, compared to 60.9% of male students.<sup>4</sup>
  - 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.<sup>4</sup>
- Of the more than two million bachelor's degrees conferred in 2022-23, 1,148,354 (58.4%) went to female students.<sup>4</sup>

## 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.<sup>2</sup>
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.<sup>8</sup> Ten years after graduating:
  - 63.4% of female graduates reported owning a home, compared to 61.7% of male graduates.<sup>2</sup>
  - 86% of female graduates had a retirement account, compared to 87.1% of male graduates.<sup>2</sup>

## POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Female students were more than three times as likely (15% versus 4%) to be single parents as male students.<sup>7</sup>
  - Despite the growth of student parents in higher education, the number of campuses offering childcare is declining, particularly at community colleges. Less than half of all public institutions offered childcare in 2019.<sup>5</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> [Deeper in Debt: Women and Student Loans](#). The American Association of University Women, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> [Digest of Education Statistics](#). National Center for Education Statistics, December 2025.

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

<sup>6</sup> [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics, January 2026.

<sup>7</sup> [National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

<sup>8</sup> [Wealth Analysis FAQ](#). Urban Institute, 2021.