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.[1] Among American Indian or Alaska Native residents aged 25 or over, 17.2% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher.[1] This rate is up from 13.9% in 2014, but falls short of the 2024 national rate of 36.8%.[1]

ENROLLMENT

- In Fall 2024, Native American students made up 0.6% of all postsecondary enrollment.[4]
- 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.[3]
- From Fall 2014 to Fall 2024, Native American enrollment decreased by 15.4% from 145,900 to 123,500.[4]
    - Undergraduate enrollment decreased from 132,800 to 110,300, a 16.9% decrease.[4]
    - Graduate enrollment increased from 13,120 to 13,210, a 0.7% increase.[4]
- 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.[4]
        - 28.8% attended public two-year institutions.[4]
- 78.3% of the Fall 2022 enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) identified as Native American.[3]

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.[5]
    - 45% of Native American students received a Pell Grant, compared to 40% of all students.[5]
    - 26% of Native American students received federal student loans, compared to 35% of all students.[5]
- Among Native American students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount was $6,985, the lowest among racial/ethnic groups.[5]
    - The average Pell Grant amount for Native American students was $4,144.[5]
    - The average federal student loan amount for Native American students was $6,908.[5]

* 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.[4]
- 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.[4]
- Of the nearly two million bachelor's degrees conferred in 2023-24, 8,008 (0.4%) went to Native American students.[4]

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

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Native American students are less likely to enroll in Advanced Placement or college preparatory courses in high school.[6]
- 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 lived in a household with a parent who completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 56% of white children.[3]
  - 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.[3]

DATA SOURCES

[1] American Community Survey & Current Population Survey. U.S. Census Bureau, January 2026.
[2] Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal Study. National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.
[3] Digest of Education Statistics. National Center for Education Statistics, December 2025.
[4] Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. National Center for Education Statistics, January 2026.
[5] National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey. National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.
[6] Office of Civil Rights. Department of Education, October 2022.
[7] Wealth Analysis FAQ. Urban Institute, 2021.