Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Veteran Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

In 2024, 5.9% of the population aged 18 and over were veterans of the U.S. military.[1] Females constitute 11.1% of veterans.[1] White non-Hispanic people were the most represented racial/ethnic group among veterans at 70.9%, compared to 13.0% Black or African American, 9.2% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 8.1% reporting two or more races, and 2.8% reporting a race/ethnicity not listed.[1] For veterans aged 25 or over, 32.8% held a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 37.1% of non-veterans.[1]

ENROLLMENT

- In 2019-20, 3.7% of undergraduates were veterans.[5]
  - 2.8% of public 4-year, 2.9% of private nonprofit 4-year, 4.3% of public 2-year, and 7.5% of for-profit institution enrollments were veterans.[5]
- Veteran students were twice as likely to attend for-profit institutions and slightly more likely to attend public 2-year institutions than the national average.[5]
  - 12.6% of veterans attended for-profit institutions, compared to 6.2% of all students.[5]
  - 33.7% attended public 2-year institutions, compared to 29.3% of all students.[5]
- 3.8% of students enrolled at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) were veterans, compared to 3.6% at non-MSIs.[5]
- 63% of veteran students were aged 30 or older, compared to 19% of non-veteran students.[5]
- The average time between completing high school and enrolling in postsecondary education was 9.5 years for veteran students, compared to 1.6 years for non-veteran students.[3]
- 7.5% of American Indian or Alaska Native, 4.6% of Black, 4.2% of White, 3.8% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2.4% of Hispanic or Latino, and 1.7% of Asian students were veterans.[5]

FINANCIAL AID

- In 2023-24, 396,654 students received Post-9/11 GI Bill financial benefits, averaging $11,307 per recipient, while 144,831 received Department of Defense (DOD) Tuition Assistance Program benefits, averaging $2,384 per recipient.[4]
- 43.8% of veteran students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid other than GI Bill or DOD benefits in 2019-20, compared to 55.3% of non-veteran students.[5]
- 38.2% of veteran students received a Pell Grant, compared to 40.3% of non-veteran students.[5]
  - 20.9% of veteran students received a federal student loan, compared to 34.9% of non-veteran students.[5]
- Among veteran students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount of all federal aid received was $7,394, compared to $8,761 for non-veteran students.[5]
  - The average Pell Grant amount was $3,904 for veteran students, compared to $4,128 for non-veteran students.[5]
  - The average federal student loan amount for veteran students was $8,026, compared to $8,574 for non-veteran students.[5]

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- Among students who first enrolled in 2011-12, 16.9% of veteran students had attained a bachelor's degree within 150% time (six years), compared to 37.1% of non-veteran students.[3]
    - 52% of veteran students had attained no degree or certificate, compared to 43.7% of non-veteran students.[3]
- Among all students who had attained a bachelor's degree by 2017, less than 1% were veterans.[3]

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- Ten years after receiving a bachelor's degree, veteran graduates who reported having an income averaged a gross income of $79,371, compared to $76,293 for non-veteran students.[2]
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.[6] Ten years after graduating:
    - 73.7% of veteran graduates reported owning a home, compared to 62.4% of non-veteran graduates.[2]
    - 87.3% of veteran graduates had a retirement account, a rate similar to that among non-veteran graduates.[2]

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- 28.1% of veteran students reported having some type of disability, compared to 20.3% of non-veteran students.[5]
- According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 98.5% of veteran students were financially independent in 2019-20, compared to 41.3% of non-veteran students.[5]
    - 47.8% of veteran students had dependents.[5]
- 52.1% of veteran students worked full-time while enrolled in 2019-20, compared to 40.3% of non-veteran students.[5]
- 75.5% of veteran students reported living off-campus in 2019-20, compared to 44.3% of non-veteran students.[5]

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] Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.
[4] Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. National Center for Education Statistics, January 2026.
[5] National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.
[6] Wealth Analysis FAQ. Urban Institute, 2021.