



**NATIONAL
LANDSCAPE OF
POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS
FOR NATIVE STUDENTS**

SPECIAL THANKS

Today, colleges and universities struggle to enroll, engage, and graduate Native American students, leaving the first peoples of this land struggling to afford college or reap the full social and economic benefits of having a post-high school credential. Our nation's shameful history of neglecting—most often violently—our treaty obligations has dramatically hurt the ability of Native Americans to enjoy the benefits of higher education.

The challenges to increasing Native American student completion are similar to those faced by many of today's students. But those problems are magnified and complicated by the unique circumstances of tribal sovereignty. The challenges include making college affordable, improving public data and data use, funding Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and improving student supports at Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) and other institutions.

At Lumina Foundation—an independent, private national foundation committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all—we are committed to an Equity First approach that focuses on Black, Hispanic and Latino, and Native American students' experiences and success. We know that to create an equitable and just society, we must support efforts to eradicate systemic racial inequities.

We are proud to partner with the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) in its efforts to advocate for post-high school success, affordability, and completion among Native American students. This work is only the most recent example of NIEA's long, demonstrated commitment to advocating for high-quality academic and cultural opportunities that prepare Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians for educational success.

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INTRODUCTION

Culture-based postsecondary education is essential to strong Native nations and communities. Since time immemorial, our peoples passed centuries of technology, history, language, and knowledge on to the next generation. Today, cultural and academic education represent a crucial opportunity to elevate sovereignty and build tribal capacity and governance.

American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students represent one of the most diverse student groups stepping foot on campus today. As Native citizens, our students bring indigenous languages, cultures, histories, and experiences with them into the classroom. And as future tribal leaders, our students have a critical role in the community as a whole.

For centuries, the American education system has failed to uphold national promises to Native peoples, resulting in equity gaps that limit opportunity for our students and nations. Institutions of higher education have failed to meet the basic educational and cultural needs of Native students and their communities. Instead, these very institutions have barred Native students from entry, or served as weapons of assimilation and cultural genocide. Even today, post-secondary programs often overlook the unique cultural and academic needs of Native students, failing to provide resources for Native students to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

Postsecondary access, retention, and graduation require strong culture-based education systems that meet the needs of Native students as they leave home in search of postsecondary opportunity. Equity in access to higher education means addressing barriers that begin long before students step foot on campus. Policymakers

and institutions must take critical steps to ensure parity for Native students at the postsecondary level, from addressing gaps in K-12 college preparation and counseling to ensuring that students have the resources needed to graduate to expanding financial aid. Finally, it is critical that we have high-quality and accurate data to know where our students are attending school, understand student achievement, hold institutions accountable for supporting them, and make informed policy decisions.

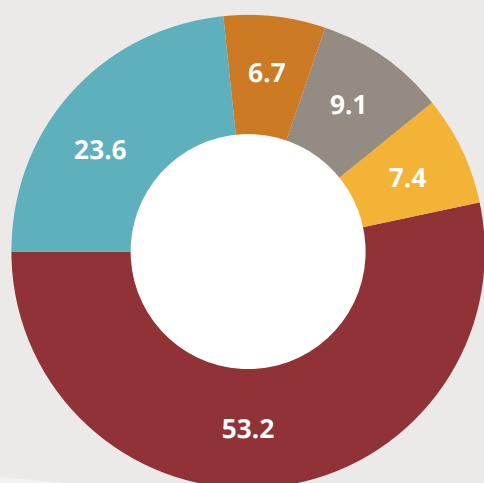




NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

As the next generation of tribal leaders and innovators, Native students are one of the most diverse student groups today. Our students enter classrooms with different life experiences than their non-Native peers, and often struggle to find resources that fully support Native students in their postsecondary journey. Attending a variety of institutions across the nation, many face systems that fail to provide resources that support the unique needs of Native students and ensure opportunity for all students.

Where do Native Students Attend School?



- Tribal Colleges & Universities
- Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions
- Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions
- Non-Native Public Colleges and Universities
- Other

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (TCUs)

Serve 12,800 enrolled Native students, approximately 6.7 percent of Native students attending institutions of higher education.¹

TCUs are two- and four- year institutions of higher education chartered by their respective tribal governments. Due to their unique relationship with tribal nations, TCUs often serve as a cultural hub for academia related to Native nations and peoples. These institutions work to prepare the next generation of Native leaders, building uniquely tailored programs that build capacity and strengthen Native nations.

Located on and near tribal lands, TCUs partner with federal and non-federal partners from the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and universities nationwide to support high-quality educational opportunities in Indian Country. TCUs qualify for HEA Title III funding, providing services to students from more than 250 federally recognized tribes on more than 75 campuses in 16 states.

NATIVE AMERICAN-SERVING NONTRIBAL INSTITUTIONS (NASNTIs)

Serve 14,100 enrolled Native students, approximately 7.4 percent of Native students attending institutions of higher education.

NASNTIs are two- and four-year institutions of higher education that serve a student body comprised of at least 10 percent Native students and which are eligible for Title III funds under the Higher Education Act. Typically rural and located near tribal nations, these schools are eligible for federal grants to improve and expand their capacity to support Native students.

Despite serving a significant proportion of Native students, delivery of culture-based and effective programming and academic services is inconsistent among NASNTIs, as does meaningful and ongoing tribal consultation. While some schools have built close tribal partnerships to support wrap-around services and culture-based curricula, others have failed to effectively engage with tribal communities. As a result, retention and graduation rates for Native students vary widely among such institutions.

ALASKA NATIVE AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN-SERVING INSTITUTIONS (ANNHSIs)

Serve 17,347 enrolled Native students, approximately 9.1 percent of Native students attending institutions of higher education.

ANNHSIs are two and four year institutions that serve at least 20 percent Alaska Native students or 10 percent Native Hawaiian students. Primarily located in Hawai'i and Alaska, these schools are eligible for federal funding

under Title III of the Higher Education Act to improve and strengthen academic quality and institutional stability. From large state schools as well as local community colleges, these institutions provide critical pathways to a high-quality postsecondary degree for nearly 10 percent of Native students.

NON-TRIBAL PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Serve 101,593 enrolled Native students, approximately 53.2 percent of Native students attending institutions of higher education.

Non-Tribal Public Colleges and Universities are generally considered to be “degree-granting institutions [that] may be governed by publicly appointed or elected officials, with major support from public funds.”² Such institutions do not have established charters with a tribal nation and do not have a specific mission to serve a significant percentage of Native students. Despite access to more resources, such institutions often lack the institutional and traditional knowledge to provide high quality cultural education options for Native students.

Flagship institutions in states with high Native student populations, such as the University of Oklahoma, represent some of the most well-known state institutions that serve large numbers of Native students in the public university space. Due to the diversity of institutions in this category, quality of programs and services for Native students vary widely.

Institutions of Higher Education Eligible for FY 2020 HEA Title III Tribal Colleges and Universities Funding

Institution Name	City	State	Type & Control	Current Grantee	Total Enrollment	Percent Undergraduate Enrollment					Percent Pell Recipients
						Native American	Pacific Islander	Asian	Black	Hispanic	
Aaniih Nakoda College	Harlem	MT	Pub 2Yr	Yes	150	83.3	0	0.0	0.9	0	70
Bay Mills Community College	Brimley	MI	Pub 4Yr	Yes	477	56	0	0.6	1	1.5	50
Blackfeet Community College	Browning	MT	Pri 2Yr	Yes	305	93.1	0	0.0	0	0	71
Cankdeska Cikana Community College	Fort Totten	ND	Pub 2Yr	Yes	178	88.2	0	0.0	0	1.1	60
Chief Dull Knife College	Lame Deer	MT	Pub 2Yr	Yes	196	89.8	0	0.0	0	0	39
College of Menominee Nation	Keshena	WI	Pri 4Yr	Yes	237	83.5	0.8	0.4	0	0.8	51
College of Muscogee Nation	Okmuglee	OK	Pub 2Yr	Yes	217	87.6	0	0.0	2.2	0	41
Dine College	Tsaliie	AZ	Pub 4Yr	Yes	1519	98.6	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	65
Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College	Cloquet	MN	Pub 2Yr	Yes	1982	6	0.1	1.2	4.9	3.5	24
Fort Peck Community College	Poplar	MT	Pub 2Yr	Yes	305	81.6	0	1.0	0	1.3	23
Haskell Indian Nations University	Lawrence	KS	Pub 4Yr	Yes	733	100	0	0.0	0	0	70
Ilisagvik College	Barrow	AK	Pub 4Yr	Yes	335	60.9	4.8	6.9	0	3.3	9
Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development	Santa Fe	NM	Pub 4Yr	Yes	589	70.5	0	1.2	9.2	0.7	35
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College	Baraga	MI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	84	67.9	0	0.0	0	0	63
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College	Hayward	WI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	231	77.9	0	0.0	1	1.3	76
Leech Lake Tribal College	Cass Lake	MN	Pub 2Yr	Yes	173	85	1.2	0.0	0	1.2	76
Little Big Horn College	Crow Agency	MT	Pub 2Yr	Yes	255	98	0	0.0	1.3	0	47
Little Priest Tribal College	Winnebago	NE	Pub 2Yr	Yes	130	86.9	0	0.0	0	8.5	62
Navajo Technical University	Crownpoint	NM	Pub 4Yr	Yes	1600	95.1	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.4	69
Nebraska Indian Community College	Macy	NE	Pub 2Yr	Yes	200	92.5	0	0.0	0	0.5	50
Northwest Indian College	Bellingham	WA	Pub 4Yr	Yes	535	84.1	0.2	0.0	7.4	0.4	55
Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College	New Town	ND	Pub 4Yr	Yes	198	81.8	0	0.0	6.3	1.5	23
Oglala Lakota College	Kyle	SD	Pub 4Yr	Yes	1300	94.3	0.2	0.0	0	0.2	60
Red Lake Nation College	Red Lake	MN	Pub 2Yr	Yes	143	83.9	1.4	0.0	3.4	1.4	41
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College	Mount Pleasant	MI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	140	74.3	0	0.7	5.7	3.6	44
Salish Kootenai College	Pablo	MT	Pri 4Yr	Yes	720	74.6	0	0.1	1.4	0.4	66
Sinte Gleska University	Mission	SD	Pri 4Yr	Yes	583	94.5	0	0.0	0	0.2	58
Sisseton Wahpeton College	Sisseton	SD	Pub 2Yr	Yes	167	78.4	0	0.0	1.8	10.2	71
Sitting Bull College	Fort Yates	ND	Pub 4Yr	Yes	273	91.5	0	0.0	0	0.4	67
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute	Albuquerque	NM	Pub 2Yr	Yes	367	100	0	0.0	0	0	49
Stone Chile College	Box Elder	MT	Pub 4Yr	Yes	444	95.5	0	0.0	0	0	19
Tohono O'odham Community College	Sells	AZ	Pub 2Yr	Yes	459	84.5	0	0.0	11.3	2.4	33
Turtle Mountain Community College	Belcourt	ND	Pri 4Yr	Yes	573	96	0.2	0.0	0.4	0	72
United Tribes Technical College	Bismarck	ND	Pri 4Yr	Yes	429	91.1	0	0.0	0	2.8	79
White Earth Tribal and Community College	Mahnomen	MN	Pri 2Yr	Yes	106	87.7	0	0.0	0	0	84

Institutions of Higher Education Eligible for the FY 2020 HEA Title III Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions Grants Program

Institution Name	City	State	Type & Control	Current Grantee	Total Enrollment	Percent Undergraduate Enrollment					Percent Pell Recipients
						Native American	Pacific Islander	Asian	Black	Hispanic	
Alaska Christian College	Soldotna	AK	Pri 2Yr	No	81	91.4	3.7	0.0	0	0	93
Bacone College	Muskogee	OK	Pri 4Yr	No	271	34.3	0.4	3.7	7	22.9	66
Balden Community College	Dublin	NC	Pub 2Yr	No	1017	16.5	0.2	0.1	12.8	23.2	53
Carl Albert State College	Poteau	OK	Pub 2Yr	Yes	1900	17.8	0.1	0.5	9.1	2.4	51
Cocorino Community College	Flagstaff	AZ	Pub 2Yr	No	3719	19.4	0.6	1.3	18.8	2.9	23
CollegeAmerica-Flagstaff	Flagstaff	AZ	Pri 4Yr	No	62	30.6	1.6	0.0	14.5	0	82
Community Care College	Tulsa	OK	Pri 2Yr	No	578	14.2	0	1.4	8.7	18	74
Connors State College	Warner	OK	Pub 2Yr	No	2090	19.5	0	0.3	5.8	7.3	52
Eastern New Mexico University Ruidoso Branch Community College	Ruidoso	NM	Pub 2Yr	No	605	17.2	0.2	0.5	29.2	0.7	27
Fort Lewis College	Durango	CO	Pub 4Yr	No	3319	26.6	0.2	0.6	11.3	1	33
Montana State University-Northern	Havre	MT	Pub 4Yr	Yes	1090	11	0.5	0.4	5.2	1.9	49
New Mexico State University-Grants	Grants	AK	Pub 2Yr	No	996	31	0	0.3	40.9	1.8	36
Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College	Miami	OK	Pub 2Yr	Yes	1897	13	0.3	0.7	6.9	9.1	51
Northeastern State University	Tahlequah	OK	Pub 4Yr	No	7879	18.2	0	1.8	5.7	4.1	46
Northern Oklahoma College	Tonkawa	OK	Pub 2Yr	No	4181	17.2	0.4	1.2	11	5.4	23
Northland Pioneer College	Holbrook	AZ	Pub 2Yr	Yes	3182	3603	0.2	0.7	12.6	0.7	17
Oklahoma State University/Institute of Technology	Okmulgee	OK	Pub 4Yr	No	2401	12.7	0	0.3	8.1	2.8	45
Redlands Community College	El Reno	OK	Pub 2Yr	Yes	1929	13.4	0.2	1.2	9.7	3.1	25
Robeson Community College	Lumberton	NC	Pub 2Yr	No	1671	43.3	0.2	1.1	8.3	19.4	58
Rogers State University	Claremore	OK	Pub 4Yr	No	3633	14.9	0.2	1.5	6.2	3.9	48
San Juan College	Farmington	NM	Pub 2Yr	No	6679	31.9	0.2	0.9	17.5	0.9	32
Southeastern Oklahoma State University	Durant	OK	Pub 4Yr	No	4542	13.1	0.2	0.4	7.2	6.9	44
University of Minnesota-Morris	Morris	NM	Pub 4Yr	Yes	1552	7.5	0	2.7	5	1.8	33
University of New Mexico-Gallup Campus	Gallup	NM	Pub 2Yr	No	2190	69.5	0.2	2.6	12.5	0.7	55
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	Pembroke	NC	Pub 4Yr	No	7137	15.5	0.1	1.4	6.7	32.6	56

Institutions of Higher Education Eligible for the FY 2020 HEA Title III Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions Grant Program

Institution Name	City	State	Type & Control	Current Grantee	Total Enrollment	Percent Undergraduate Enrollment					Percent Pell Recipients
						Native American	Pacific Islander	Asian	Black	Hispanic	
Alaska Christian College	Soldotna	AK	Pri 2Yr	No	81	91.4	3.7	0.0	0	0	93
Alaska Pacific University	Anchorage	AK	Pri 4Yr	Yes	502	21.9	0.3	0.8	2.2	7.9	35
American Samoa Community College	PagoPago	AS	Pub 4Yr	No	1037	0	89.5	0.8	0	0	75
Bacone College	Muskogee	OK	Pri 4Yr	No	271	34.3	0.4	3.7	22.9	7	66
Chaminade University of Honolulu	Honolulu	HI	Pri 4Yr	Yes	2150	0.4	22.2	22.7	5	4.1	45
College of Micronesia-FSM	Pohnpei	FM	Pub 2Yr	No	1931	0	99.4	0.0	0	0	89
College of Marshall Islands	Majuro	MH	Pub 4Yr	No	1119	0	99.5	0.4	0	0	92
CollegeAmerica-Flagstaff	Flagstaff	AZ	Pri 4Yr	No	62	30.6	1.6	0.0	0	14.5	82
Fort Lewis College	Durango	CO	Pub 4Yr	No	3319	26.6	0.2	0.6	1	11.3	33
Guam Community College	Mangilao	GU	Pub 2Yr	No	2082	0.2	53.3	40.5	1	0.3	66
Honolulu Community College	Honolulu	HI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	3541	0.1	5.9	44.8	1.6	12.1	22
Illisavik College	Barrow	AK	Pub 4Yr	Yes	335	60.9	4.8	6.9	3.3	0	9
Kapiolani Community College	Honolulu	HI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	6899	0.1	3	40.6	1.1	8.9	18
Leeward Community College	Pearl City	HI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	6709	0.1	4.4	36.6	2	16.2	27
New Mexico State University-Grants	Grants	NM	Pub 2Yr	No	996	31	0	0.3	1.8	40.9	36
Pacific Islands University	Mangilao	GU	Pri 4Yr	No	62	0	86.4	3.2	0	0	87
Pacific Rim Christian University	Honolulu	HI	Pri 4Yr	No	152	0	23	13.2	5.3	14.7	50
Palau Community College	Koror	PW	Pub 2Yr	No	497	0	98	1.8	0	0	82
Remington College-Honolulu Campus	Honolulu	HI	Pri 4Yr	No	131	0.8	19.8	36.6	12.2	9.2	79
Robeson Community College	Lumberton	NC	Pub 2Yr	No	1671	43.3	0.2	1.1	19.4	8.3	58
San Juan College	Farmington	NM	Pub 2Yr	No	6679	31.9	0.2	0.9	17.5	0.9	32
University of Alaska Fairbanks	Fairbanks	AK	Pub 4Yr	Yes	7404	13.8	0.7	1.7	2.6	7.3	22
University of Alaska Southeast	Juneau	AK	Pub 4Yr	Yes	2266	13.4	2.1	2.3	1	7.6	18
University of Guam	Mangilao	GU	Pub 4Yr	No	3744	0.1	45.9	42.4	0.7	0.5	47
University of Hawaii at Hilo	Hilo	HI	Pub 4Yr	Yes	3406	0.3	9	13.0	1.3	16.1	48
University of Hawaii at Manoa	Honolulu	HI	Pub 4Yr	Yes	17710	0.1	2.9	28.4	1.4	11.8	29
University of Hawaii Maui College	Kahului	HI	Pub 4Yr	Yes	3092	0.2	6.3	28.1	0.5	12.4	31
University of New Mexico-Gallup Campus	Gallup	NH	Pub 2Yr	No	2190	69.5	0.2	2.6	0.7	12.5	55
Winward Community College	Kaneohe	HI	Pub 2Yr	Yes	2460	0	5.8	19.3	1.1	19.9	26



POSTSECONDARY PREPARATION AND ACCESS

Barriers to college access begin long before Native students step foot on campus. Gaps in access to advanced coursework, consistent high-quality educators, modern classroom infrastructure, and career counseling services serve to limit postsecondary opportunities in Native communities. However, these gaps are rooted in an education system that actively sought to dismantle Native nations.

Federal education policy for Native students was founded to assimilate Native peoples. Echoes of these policies continue to exist in our education systems that prepare Native children for college. Federal law to support Native students begins with the following words, originally penned in 1819, as part of legislation titled “An Act making provision for the civilization of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlements.”

“The President may, in every case where he shall judge improvement in the habits and condition of such Indians practicable, and that the means of instruction can be introduced with their own consent, employ capable persons of good moral character to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation; and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and performing such other duties as may be enjoined according to such instructions and rules as the President may give and prescribe for the regulation of their conduct, in the discharge of their duties.”

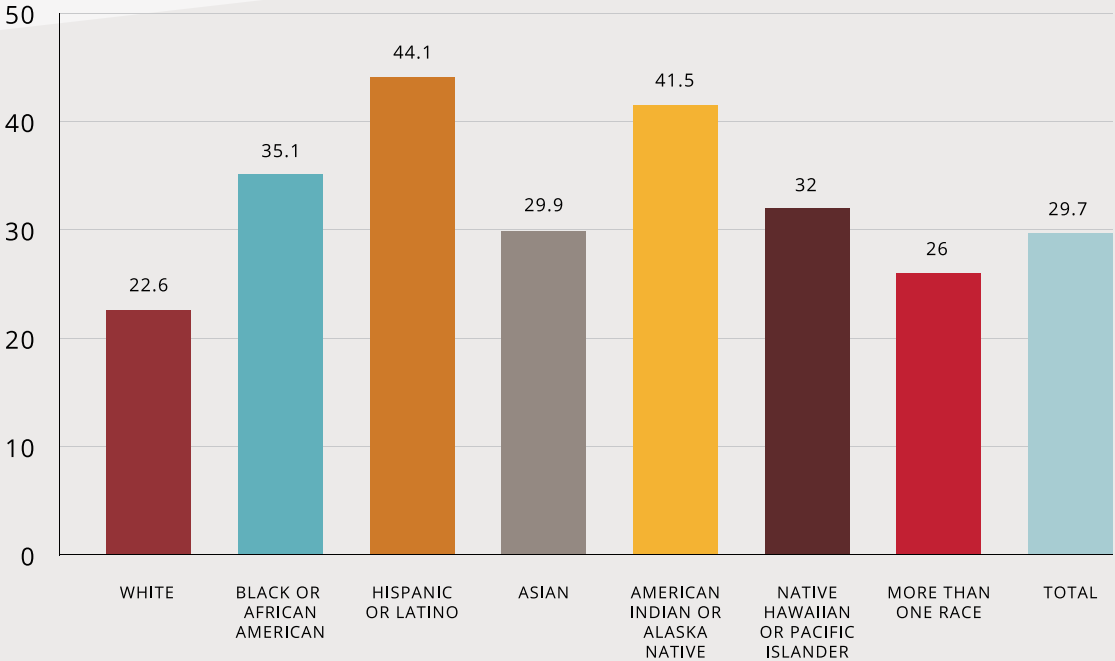
Postsecondary access requires a strong culture-based education system that actively seeks to elevate sovereignty and thriving Native communities. This system must address multiple pathways to higher education and maximize Native student success, from the day students enter preschool to the day students graduate from college.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES FOR POSTSECONDARY ACCESS

More than 2 in 5 Native students are the first in their family to pursue a postsecondary degree, or the first to consider a particular career path. For this reason, many rely on pre-college advising and support systems available in the school. However, a majority of schools that serve Native students, including the Bureau of Indian Education and public schools on tribal lands, do not have adequate resources to support equity in postsecondary access due to a long history of underfunding education in Native communities. From advanced placement classes to college and career counseling, Native schools often do not have the resources to provide equity in access to their students compared to more well-resourced schools across the nation.

Such inequities have resulted in a 75 percent high school completion rate for Native students, compared to a national average of 93 percent. This immediately limits opportunities for roughly a quarter of Native students; K-12 schools that serve a high number of Native students often lack the resources to have robust college preparatory programs.

First Generation College Students



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study

FINANCIAL BURDEN OF COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

High costs associated with college admissions can impose heavy burdens on low-income Native students. Though competitive institutions with large endowments may have the resources to offer larger financial aid packages to students, these institutions often require high test scores and charge a higher application fee. Purchasing test preparation materials, paying for the tests, and applying for college can cost hundreds of dollars that students and their families cannot afford, particularly if they do not have access to advising and resources to obtain waivers for applicable fees. Such costs widen the opportunity gap for Native students at such institutions, highlighting the importance of TCUs and Native-serving institutions in providing crucial postsecondary opportunities in Native communities.

POSTSECONDARY RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Colleges and universities currently use diverse strategies to recruit students across the nation. However, the most common methods of student engagement fail to reach many Native students, particularly in rural and reservation areas where limited internet access prohibits the effectiveness of online outreach.

Due to the small populations and rural locations, many college admissions offices do not send college admissions officers or representatives to schools on and near tribal lands. In addition, admissions teams often favor areas with expected family incomes that are able to cover the cost of tuition, again placing Native students at a disadvantage while favoring urban and suburban schools.

Alternative strategies, including social media and online marketing campaigns for low-income and historically underrepresented students, often fail to reach Native students due to low rates of access to broadband and internet in Native communities. Such methods often group Native peoples as a monolith and fail to understand the unique considerations of our students in rural and reservation areas versus those in urban and suburban classrooms.



RETENTION & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Student retention and recruitment efforts are inextricably intertwined for Native communities. Due to their historic role in the assimilation of Native peoples, institutions of higher education have long failed to recognize crucial infrastructural failures that create opportunity gaps for Native students. In order to attract and support Native students, institutions must create systemic change that supports long-term cultural and academic success.

Despite significant strides in recent decades, Native students face consistent and often artificial barriers that prevent them from staying in school and obtaining a postsecondary degree. Lack of cultural knowledge often results in inflexible institutional policies that fail to support Native students in meeting cultural and family obligations. As a result, geographic location, cultural competency, and wrap-around services on campus are critical to ensuring that Native students obtain a degree.

These obstacles have led to the lowest college participation rates in the nation, at 19 percent. Likewise, the six-year college graduation rate for American Indian and Alaska Native students is 39 percent, the lowest of any group in the United States.

BROADBAND ACCESS

Often, Native students have disproportionately limited access to internet speeds adequate to support homework completion and online education resources. In 2017, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 36 percent of Native students nationwide did not have internet access in their homes, compared to 18 percent of their peers nationwide. Just last year, the Center for Indian Country Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis further clarified that this effect is more pronounced on tribal lands, where only 61 percent of households have broadband access. In comparison, 70 percent of residents in the typical county that overlaps a reservation and 69 percent nationwide have access to broadband in the home.

INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

Institutions of higher education often fail to adequately support Native students who come from communities unlike the one in which they study. Staff and students often lack basic knowledge regarding Native nations, sovereignty, and the federal trust responsibility, which creates gaps when fulfilling the basic needs of Native students, from developing a cultural center, communicating with tribal education agencies, or supporting student aid for Native students. With oftentimes few American Indian or Alaska Native classmates and a lack of instructional support for culture and community, Native students are prevented from flourishing.

Below are some of the most frequent strategies used by higher education institutions to address gaps in programs and services that support Native students on campus.

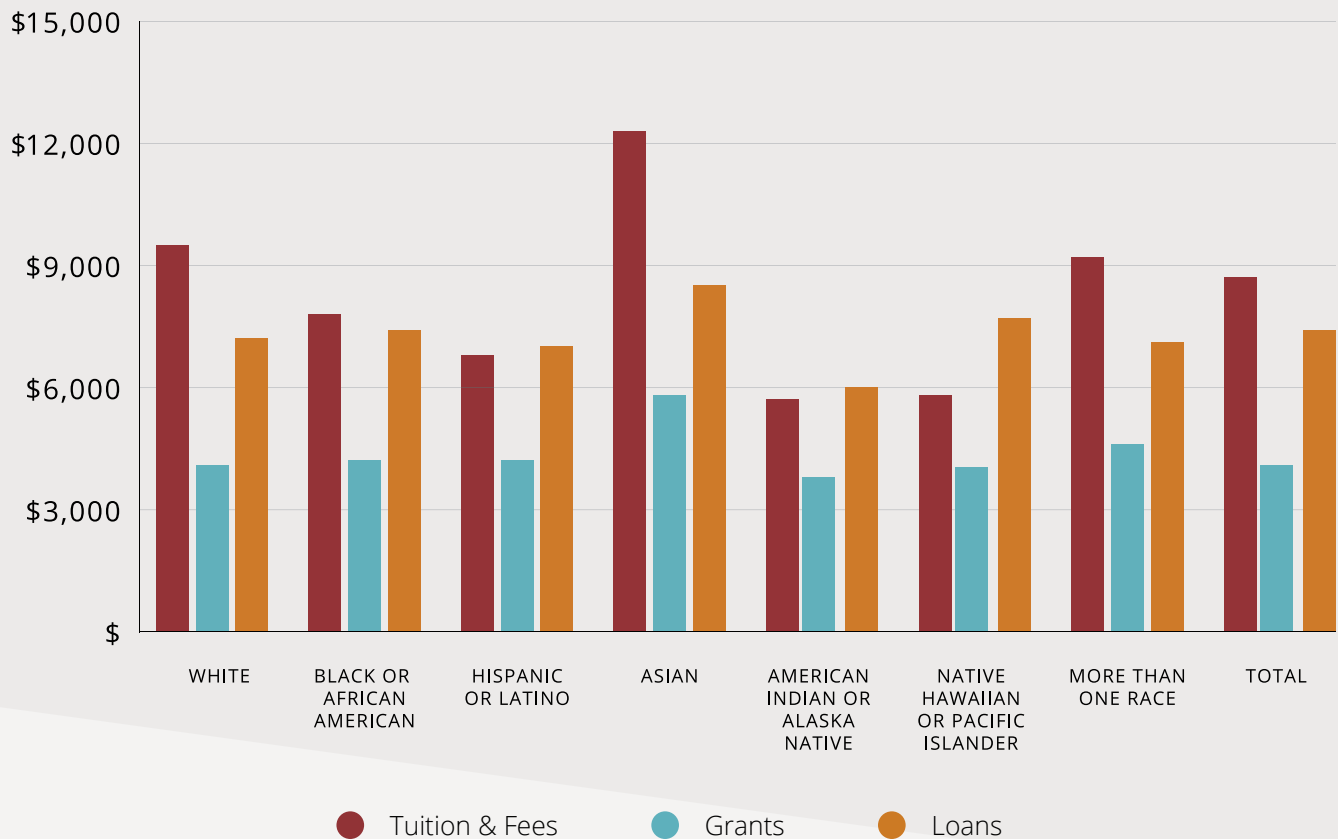
- **Create a Tribal Advisory Council** made of tribal leaders, Native faculty and students, policy makers, and other staff that work on a variety of issues that impact Native students on campus and in their communities.
- **Hire Native Faculty** to provide robust scholarship that engages a diverse student body, including Native students, thereby increasing recruitment and the retention of Native students.
- **Enhance Networks between Higher Education Institutions, Tribal Communities, and Tribal Education Entities** to build capacity and share effective strategies and resources to recruit and retain Native students.
- **Improve Native Studies Curriculum** to expand academic study, share general knowledge of modern tribal nations on campus, and build applicable research skills.



AFFORDABILITY & FINANCIAL AID

Disproportionate barriers to funding postsecondary education in Native communities generate obstacles to completing a degree at many institutions. Equity in access to higher education requires that we remove barriers to funding postsecondary opportunities and expand options that work for Native students. Federal financial aid is essential to reducing the opportunity gap and assuring equity of access in Indian Country. Though Native students depend on federal student grant and loan programs to afford college, some have proven more successful in supporting Native students after they leave the classroom.

Tuition, Grants, and Loans for Postsecondary Students



BARRIERS TO AFFORDABILITY

As the first in their families to attend postsecondary institutions, many Native students do not have a support network to navigate the financial aspects of the college experience. From the time students receive financial aid award letters, critical living expenses are often not calculated in the cost of attendance at a postsecondary institution, derailing many Native students from graduating on time. In a 2019 report, 34 percent of tribal college students worried that they would run out of food before their next paycheck and 28 percent reported that they had run out of food and not been able to buy more in the past year.³ One unexpected trip to the doctor or to the car repair shop can cause a student to drop out of class due to competing financial priorities.

UNIQUE APPROACH TO COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) have addressed the economic reality of many students with a commitment to keep costs low for students. For all but two TCUs, this has meant avoiding participation in the federal student loan programs, which have a historically high default rate among Native communities.

Of the two TCUs who have made student loans available, one was among the 15 institutions placed under sanctions in FY 2016 for high rates of student loan defaults among graduates. In an effort to halt this trend, the United Tribes Technical College launched a tribal tuition waiver pilot program available to Native students, which became permanent in 2018. At that time, the college reported that “the GPAs of students under the waiver increased by nearly half a grade level, from 2.116 to 2.57, and class completion rose from 68 percent to 78 percent.”⁴

STUDENT LOANS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Despite growing federal focus on the student loan crisis nationwide, high-quality data regarding the use and efficacy of student loans in Indian Country remains scarce. Most current studies that examine student loans and postgraduate default rates fail to report on Native students. However, the existing data paints a complicated picture for Native students with student loans.

Due to the strong commitment of TCUs to reduce the student debt load on tribal communities, Native students on average take out the lowest average amount of student loans at only \$9,000 per year. In 2019, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 38 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives have applied for and received student loans to finance their education.⁵ However, over 40 percent of Native students who take out loans will go into default once they graduate. This reflects the systemic challenges that students face when deciding to take on loans, as well as those faced entering the workforce.

When stepping foot on campus for the first time, many Native students have never applied or have experience with applying for or paying back a loan. Due to limited advising and financial planning resources, Native students disproportionately take out more loans than they need, or more than they are able to pay back after leaving the classroom. After graduation, these same students do not have access to equity of resources to pay back loans in the same way as their peers. American Indians and Alaska Natives experience the highest rate of unemployment in the nation, at 11 percent, compared to 4 percent for white adults.⁶ Perceived postgraduate employment opportunities and expected wages have the potential to prevent Native students from setting foot on campus, completing their degree, and repaying loans after graduation.

FEDERAL GRANTS PROGRAMS

Eighty-seven percent of full-time undergraduate Native students rely on grants to attain higher education, a rate which is significantly higher than the national average.⁷ These funds are critical for the overwhelming majority of Native students, who would not otherwise be able to afford to matriculate.

Unlike loans, which students must pay back, federal grants such as the Pell grant allow low-income students the flexibility to focus on academic endeavors, opening the door for many to matriculate who would otherwise be unable to fund their higher education. However, funding provided through such programs has failed to keep up with the soaring cost of higher education at colleges and universities across the nation. Funding for federal student aid must increase and be indexed to inflation.

IMPACT OF RISING COLLEGE TUITION

College tuition rates have skyrocketed in comparison to financial aid in recent years. Such increases negate the impact of increased funding and place additional burden on students to find outside sources of funding when their budgets are stretched thin. In addition to a high-quality and robust system of federal financial aid, postsecondary access in Native communities requires institutions to reduce rising tuition rates to ensure that low-income students do not bear the financial burden of such increases.





POSTGRADUATE CAREER OPPORTUNITY

A postsecondary degree remains one of the most visible indicators of postgraduate opportunity for Native students across the nation. A 2013 examination of Native employment rates concluded that “The factor that does the most to increase American Indians’ odds of employment is higher education. [...] American Indians with advanced degrees have seven times the odds of American Indians with less than a high school education.”⁸ Despite such evidence, the impact of an undergraduate or graduate education can vary based on the institutional resources and preparation provided through the degree program.

INSTITUTIONAL POSTGRADUATE PREPARATION

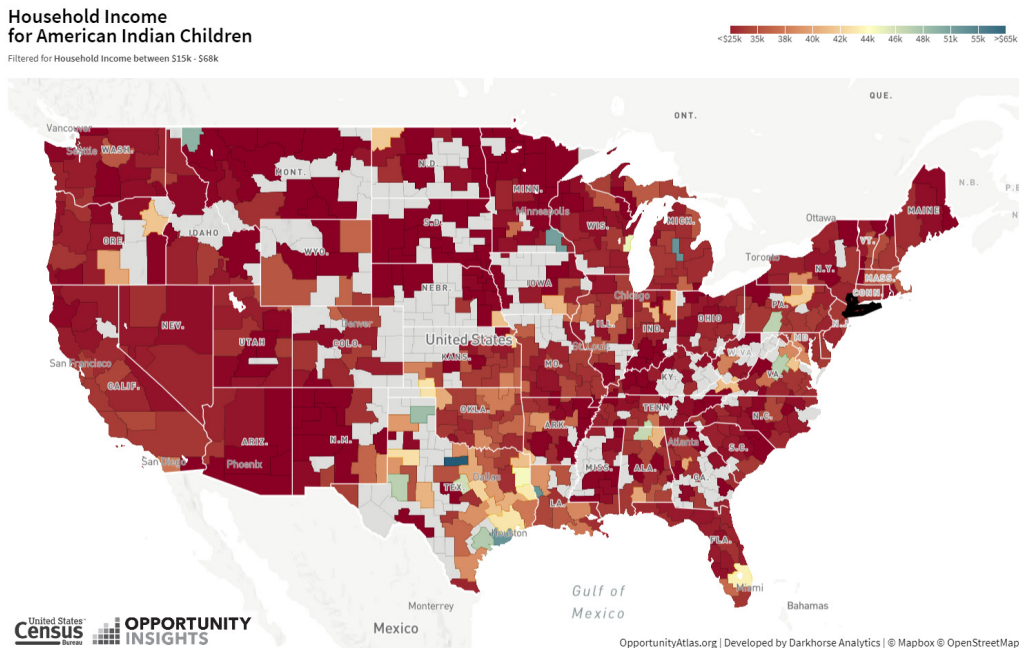
The undergraduate experience is founded in building skills that prepare students for a successful career. However, current gaps in college advising and career counseling highlight the unique needs of Native students entering the workforce. Like their low-income and first generation peers, many Native students do not have an established network or experience building a network for career advice and opportunities. Many Native students also experience financial constraints that limit certain opportunities, including unpaid or low-paying internships or fellowships. In addition, the unique cultural and traditional obligations of some Native students may limit where a student is willing to move or work after graduating. Institutions can and should create culturally relevant programs to advise and transition the workforce. Such programs must address the unique workforce needs of students in the area that they are seeking to enter.

EXPECTED RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Postsecondary education in Native communities represents a form of civic engagement and investment in the future of Native nations. Many Native students feel a strong pull to remain connected to their communities, often returning after graduation to serve their nations and become community leaders. Postsecondary education provides many the tools necessary to build tribal capacity and expand sovereignty.

Though employment opportunities for Native students improve with additional education, scholarship regarding the earnings potential of Native graduates remains inconclusive. One expert found that when compared to their peers, American Indian and Alaska Natives “reap larger returns in terms of [labor force participation] and employment but experience smaller gains in earnings than otherwise similar white college graduates.”⁹ The United States Census Bureau Opportunity Atlas provides similar insight, showing a stark contrast in what an American Indian or Alaska Native child might expect to earn in their lifetime versus that of their peers. These examinations of expected postgraduate earnings support Native students who may be reluctant to take on large student debt.

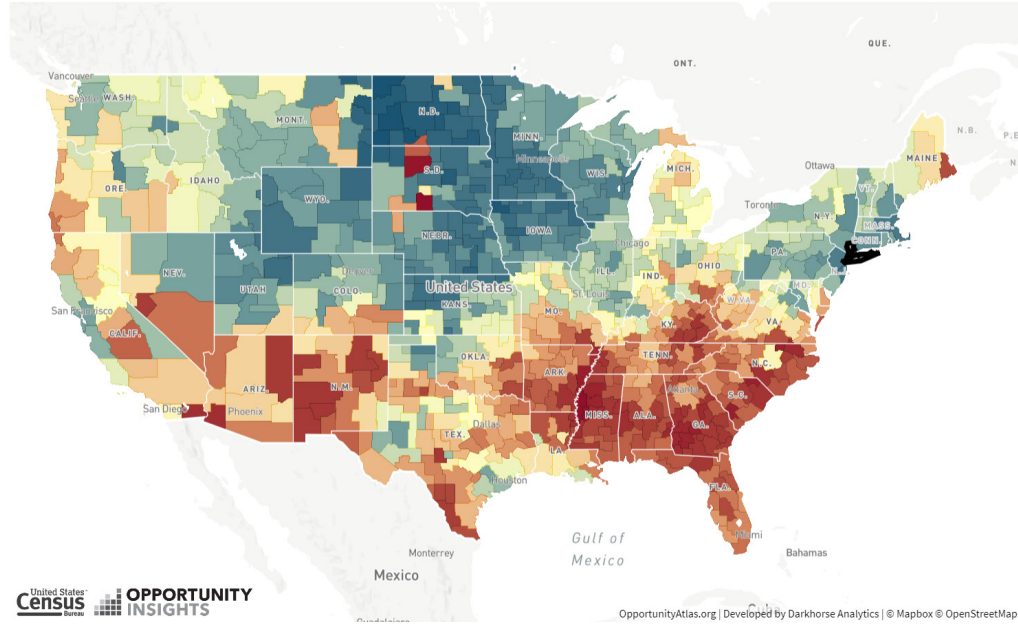
Landscape of Opportunity for American Indian Children - Adult Household Income by Census Tract



Landscape of Opportunity for Children - Adult Household Income by Census Tract

Household Income for Children

Filtered for Household Income between \$15k - \$68k



United States Census Bureau OPPORTUNITY INSIGHTS

OpportunityAtlas.org | Developed by Darkhorse Analytics | © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap



DATA SOVEREIGNTY AND EFFECTIVE DATA COLLECTION

Accurate and reliable data is the foundation of effective policy. High-quality data is critical to advancing institutions and services that support the unique needs of Native students. Tribal leaders and policymakers rely on high-quality data to inform programs that serve our students. Data can also ensure that students are well informed when selecting a college, that institutions are serving Native students well, and that any disproportionality can be elevated and, ideally, remediated.

Despite these critical functions, high-quality postsecondary data for Native students remains scarce. Due to small sample sizes and federal guidelines for national surveys, Native students are often excluded from federal datasets and reports related to postsecondary completion and success. As a result, federal datasets often contribute to the erasure of Native peoples in national policies, programs, and services, expanding equity gaps in education and postgraduate success.

EXCLUSIONARY FEDERAL DATA POLICY

In 2007, the OMB released new Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, which limited federal data related to Native communities to those who identify exclusively as American Indian or Alaska Native. According to data from the 2010 Census, this rule excludes 57 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native citizens from being identified as Native in

federal data collections. Due to the growing number of multi-racial students that are citizens of Native nations, these rules have a disproportionate effect on our students and their families. The result is a systematic erasure of Native students in federal data systems, mirroring the federal government's historic efforts to make Native populations disappear.

FEDERAL DEFINITIONS OF NATIVE STUDENTS

Unlike many student subgroups, federal statutes include definitions that refer to Native students, including "Indian", "Alaska Native", "Native Hawaiian", and "Native American", among others. These terms are often defined differently not only between the underlying statute for programs and services between agencies, but also among different programs within the same agency. For example, the definition of an Indian student under Title VI of the Every Student Succeeds Act is different than that of an Indian student for enrollment at TCUs, a Native American student at NASNTIs, or an Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian student at ANNHISIs.

Due to the diversity of legal language in underlying statute, data collection on student enrollment across federal agencies and programs is highly inconsistent. Even within the same program, it is common for schools and institutions to utilize different definitions and methods to identify and report on services that support Native students, further compounding the lack of clarity in data collection.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY IN FINANCIAL AID DATA

Data sovereignty is critical both for Native students and for tribes, but the federal government is not upholding its end of the bargain. Tribes are sovereign nations and, in accordance with federal law, treaties, and Supreme Court cases, must be treated as such by the federal government. Furthermore, tribes contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to funding higher education for their citizens. When tribes do not have access to data, it is a barrier to Native students that depend upon support from their tribe to complete their education.



CONCLUSION

The spread of COVID-19 in tribal communities has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequities for Native students. While Native nations acted quickly to limit community transmission, institutions of higher education closed classrooms across the nation. As a result, many of our students were cut off from on-campus infrastructure and resources.

During COVID-19, broad inequities in tribal access to broadband resources, devices, and online programming became a crucial barrier to continuing postsecondary education among Native students. At the same time, many students faced critical decisions regarding whether to delay college matriculation or return to college in the fall due to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Native families and communities. And graduating students face bleak economic prospects that threaten to have long-term impacts on the financial health and well-being of Native nations for years to come.

Equity in higher education for all requires a concentrated effort to fulfill federal promises to Native nations and citizens. Though COVID-19 has stripped bare inequities for the general public, our students have faced similar barriers to entry, completion, and postgraduate success for centuries. Institutions of higher education must take deliberate steps to address historic disparities and ensure current systems actively support postsecondary achievement for all students.

END NOTES

- 1 Please note that data in this section includes American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students as reported by the Integrated Postsecondary Data System to provide a full landscape of Native postsecondary enrollment in the United States. This significantly reduces the data for Tribal Colleges and Universities, which serve approximately 10 percent of full time enrolled American Indian and Alaska Native students.
- 2 [“Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions,”](#) National Center for Education Statistics, May 2020.
- 3 [“Preserving Culture and Planning for the Future An Exploration of Student Experiences at Tribal Colleges,”](#) Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2019.
- 4 [“UTTC makes tuition waiver permanent.”](https://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/bismarck/uttc-makes-tuition-waiver-permanent/article_ec9258e3-ad73-5082-8e0b-569d20bc1ba8.html) Bismarck Tribune. April 2018. https://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/bismarck/uttc-makes-tuition-waiver-permanent/article_ec9258e3-ad73-5082-8e0b-569d20bc1ba8.html
- 5 [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: 2018. National Center for Education Statistics. P.138.](#)
- 6 [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: 2018. National Center for Education Statistics. P.vii.](#)
- 7 [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups: 2018. National Center for Education Statistics. P. 134.](#)
- 8 Algernon Austin, [“Native Americans and Jobs: The Challenge and the Promise,”](#) Economic Policy Institute, December 2013, <https://www.epi.org/files/2013/NATIVE-AMERICANS-AND-JOBS-The-Challenge-and-the-Promise.pdf>.
- 9 Algernon Austin, [“Native Americans and Jobs: The Challenge and the Promise,”](#) Economic Policy Institute, December 2013, <https://www.epi.org/files/2013/NATIVE-AMERICANS-AND-JOBS-The-Challenge-and-the-Promise.pdf>.