



# Postsecondary Education of Native Americans

Since the nation’s early years, the United States of America has enacted federal policies intended to provide educational opportunities to Indian peoples. The federal government maintains and supports its trust relationship with Indian tribes through various postsecondary education programs and initiatives. The trust relationship is a responsibility derived from federal statutes, treaties, court decisions, executive actions, and the Constitution (which assigns authority over federal-Indian relations to Congress). The provision of postsecondary education opportunities for members of the Native American community is one manifestation of that relationship.

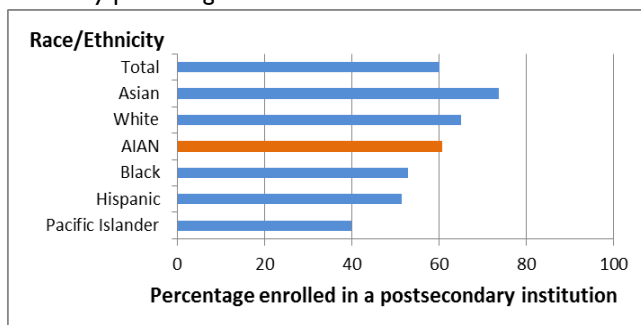
This In Focus reviews college enrollment patterns and educational attainment levels of Native Americans and federal programs that support Indian postsecondary attainment. For information on Indian elementary and secondary education programs and issues, see CRS Report RL34205, *Indian Elementary-Secondary Education: Programs, Background, and Issues*.

## Postsecondary Access

According to the most recently published statistics of the Department of Education (ED), as shown in **Figure 1**, the percentage (61%) of American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) high school completers who enrolled immediately after high school completion in a degree/certificate college program was approximately equivalent to the national average (60%).

**Figure 1. Percentage of Fall 2009 Ninth-Graders Completing High School Who Enrolled in a Postsecondary Degree or Certificate Program by Fall 2013, by Race/Ethnicity**

Sorted by percentage enrolled



**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Education Sciences, Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, Table 302.43.

**Notes:** AIAN is American Indian/Alaska Native.

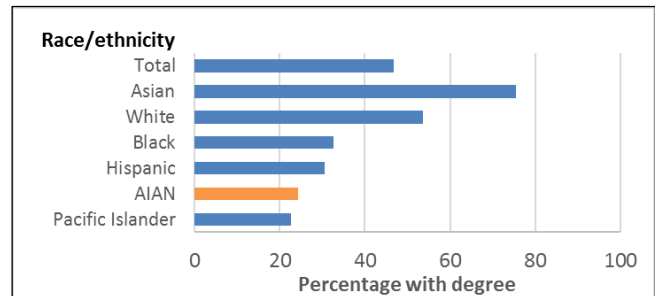
## Postsecondary Completion

ED’s published statistics indicate that associate’s or baccalaureate degree attainment by young AIAN persons (24%) is lower than that of most other racial/ethnic groups

(**Figure 2**). The national average degree attainment level of all 25-to-29-year-olds in 2018 was 47%.

**Figure 2. Postsecondary Completion Percentage of 25-to-29-Year-Olds, by Race/Ethnicity, 2018**

Sorted by percentage with degree



**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Education Sciences, Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, Table 104.20.

**Notes:** AIAN is American Indian/Alaska Native.

## Federal Programs and Support

The federal government provides support to help members of federally recognized tribes access and complete higher education. The efforts described below primarily or exclusively support tribal members.

Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs) and AIANs are also eligible for and benefit from general educational assistance programs. For example, AIANs may be eligible to receive Pell Grants as a result of their financial status and not because they are members of federally recognized tribes.

## Federally Operated or Established Institutions

The federal government operates two postsecondary institutions for tribal members and established one for the preservation of tribal culture.

The federal government, through the Department of the Interior (DOI), owns, operates, and funds two postsecondary institutions for tribal members—Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in New Mexico. Haskell is a four-year liberal arts university with approximately 800 undergraduates. SIPI, a two-year college with almost 400 students, primarily awards associate’s degrees in liberal arts, business, health professions, and computer sciences. Both institutions charge no tuition and less than \$1,100 annually in fees. In FY2019, the two institutions received a direct appropriation of \$23 million that excludes funds from other programs.

The federal government established the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), formally known as the

Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development, in New Mexico. IAIA is an independent, multi-tribal nonprofit higher education institution for Native Americans dedicated to the study, creative application, preservation, and care of Indian arts and culture (20 U.S.C., Chapter 56). IAIA is federally chartered and under the direction and control of a Board of Trustees appointed by the President of the United States. Admissions are not limited to tribal members. The four-year university enrolls over 600 undergraduate and graduate students. Undergraduate tuition and fees for domestic students were under \$5,000 in AY2017-2018. In FY2019, the institution received a direct appropriation of \$10 million that excludes funds from other programs.

### Institutional Support for Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs)

Tribes formally control, sanction, or charter 32 colleges and universities, enrolling approximately 22,000 students. TCCUs are located around the Great Lakes, in the plains states, in the Southwest and Northwest, and in Alaska. TCCUs reflect tribal ideals of self-determination and culturally relevant educational attainment. Admissions are not generally limited to tribal members. AY2017-2018 undergraduate tuition and fees range from \$900 to \$6,600, depending on the TCCU. Approximately two-thirds of TCCUs are two-year colleges. The majority of federal funding for TCCUs comes from formula grant programs administered by DOI, ED, and the Department of Agriculture (USDA). Haskell, SIPI, and IAIA are also generally eligible to receive funding from the TCCU programs.

DOI and ED each administer two programs—one for the technical TCCUs (United Tribes Technical College and Navajo Technical University) and one for the other TCCUs.

- The DOI Tribal Colleges and Universities program (Titles I and II of the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (TCCUAA; P.L. 95-471, as amended) funds the operation, improvement, and expansion of the TCCUs to ensure continued and expanded educational opportunities for Indian students. In FY2019, the program was appropriated \$72 million.
- The ED Strengthening Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities program (Title III of the Higher Education Act) aims to improve and expand TCCU institutional capacity. In FY2019, the program was appropriated \$60 million. For more information, see CRS Report R43237, *Programs for Minority-Serving Institutions Under the Higher Education Act*.
- The DOI Tribal Technical Colleges program (Title V of TCCUAA) funds the costs of operating postsecondary career and technical education programs for Indian students at the technical TCCUs. In FY2019, the program was appropriated \$8 million.

- The ED Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Institutions (Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (P.L. 115-224) funds expenses associated with career and technical education programs for Indian students at the technical TCCUs. In FY2019, the program was appropriated \$10 million. For more information, see CRS Report R45446, *Reauthorization of the Perkins Act in the 115th Congress: The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*.

The USDA administers four programs authorized by the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (Title V-C of P.L. 103-382; 7 U.S.C. §301 note) for the 1994 land grant institutions, also known as TCCUs. Land grant institutions are intended to provide agricultural and mechanical arts instruction and disseminate college research to practitioners. The First Morrill Act in 1862 provided grants of land to the states to establish the first land-grant institutions. The Second Morrill Act in 1890 provided grants for the establishment and funding of land-grant institutions that would enroll Black students. In 1994, P.L. 103-382 extended land-grant status to the TCCUs. The Tribal College Equity program supports program and course improvement. The Tribal College Extension program supports informal, community-based learning such as farmer education. The Tribal College Research program helps the 1994 institutions build scientific capacity and research knowledge for students. The Tribal College Endowment Program (Capacity Grant) may be used at the discretion of the 1994 institutions. In FY2019, the programs were appropriated \$22 million.

### Financial Assistance for Indian Students

Besides the so-called land-grant institutions, two states received grants of land in exchange for each maintaining a school that admits Indian students free of tuition charge. The schools are the University of Minnesota-Morris (35 Stat. 781) and Fort Lewis College in Colorado (36 Stat. 269). In FY2012 (the most recent estimate available), the states valued the benefit at approximately \$16 million.

The Cobell Education Scholarship Fund (Fund), authorized by the Cobell Settlement through the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-291), provides merit- and need-based awards to tribal members for postsecondary education. In 2017, DOI fulfilled its maximum allowable contribution to the Fund—\$60 million.

DOI provides financial assistance to tribal members pursuing GED completion, undergraduate and graduate-level study, and post-graduate-level opportunities through the Scholarships and Adult Education program, Special Higher Education Scholarships, and Science Post-Graduate Scholarship Fund. In FY2019, they were collectively appropriated \$40 million.

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Cassandra Dortch, Specialist in Education Policy

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