

# Higher Education and Training for Native American/Alaska Native Students in Oregon

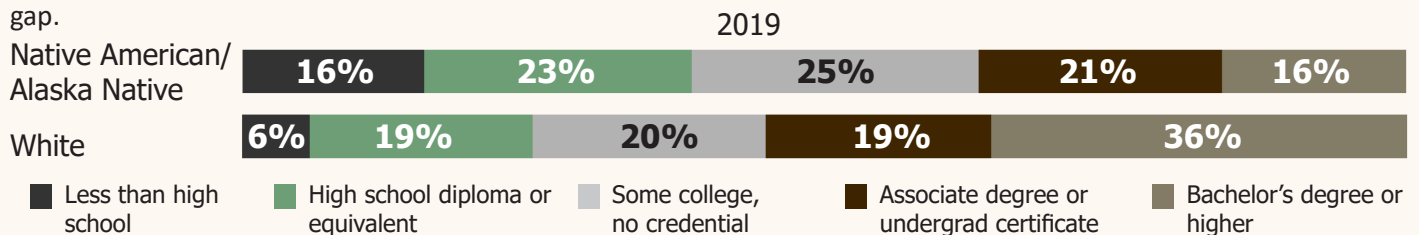
November 2021



This report presents information about education and training after high school for Oregonians who identify as Native American/Alaska Native, focusing mostly on their experience at Oregon’s community colleges and public universities. Postsecondary education and training is the primary route to upward mobility and economic stability for individuals and for communities, and it is a key to Oregon’s recovery from the pandemic recession. However, Oregonians do not experience these benefits to the same degree. This report compares Native American/Alaska Native learners with White learners to show where equity gaps exist and where progress in reducing these gaps has or has not been made. We note that no group experiences these benefits fully. Data shown here come from educational records, employment wage records, and the U.S. Census. We use the term “Native American/Alaska Native” to reflect terms used by student groups and on identification forms, recognizing that this overarching term fails to acknowledge the nations and tribes of specific students. Adult learners self-select their racial/ethnic identity usually from seven options: “American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White,” and no selection.

## Fewer Native American/Alaska Native Oregonians Can Enjoy the Benefits of Postsecondary Education

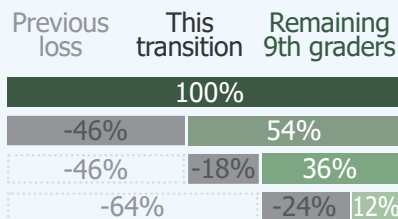
The licensures, degrees, and career and technical certificates earned in postsecondary education and training open the door to lifelong benefits for individuals, families, and communities. Inequitable access to preparation and opportunity, marginalizing experiences, and competing obligations mean Native American/Alaska Native Oregonians are less likely than White Oregonians to enjoy these benefits. The graph below shows how many Oregon adults over 25 have different levels of education and training. The rest of this report shows some of the issues leading to this gap.



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey. Adults 25 and older.

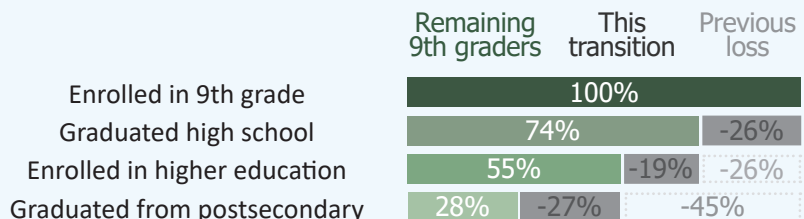
## Oregon Loses Native American/Alaska Native Talent at Every Step

### Native American/Alaska Native



**88%** of Native American/Alaska Native 9th graders did not obtain a college degree or certificate within six years after high school.

### White



**72%** of White 9th graders did not obtain a college degree or certificate within six years after high school.

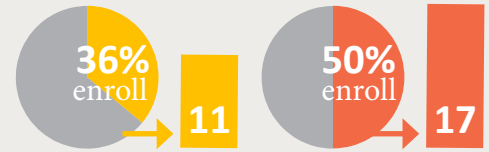
Students lost along each step in our educational system are less equipped to find and maintain economic stability for themselves, their families, and their communities. Opportunities exist at each stage to interrupt this cycle of loss and begin in the earliest grades.

Source: Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and HECC analysis of student-level data. Rates may differ from ODE due to cohort definitions.

# High School is the Foundation for Postsecondary Education

Increasing options to earn college credit while in high school help many students jump-start college at little to no cost. However, Native American/Alaska Native students are less likely to enroll in college courses (36%) and those who do enroll earn fewer credits before high school graduation than White students.

% of students taking college courses in high school and average # of credits they earn



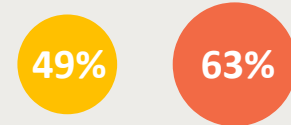
Gaps in high school graduation have been closing, but only 67% of Oregon's Native American/Alaska Native students graduate today, compared to 84% of Whites, and graduation rates were lower for earlier classes, which puts current adults seeking to earn a postsecondary credential at an even greater disadvantage.

High school graduation rate



For those who do graduate from high school, the percentage who enroll in college or university within 16 months is lower for Native American/Alaska Native than White students.

College-going rate for 2017-18 class

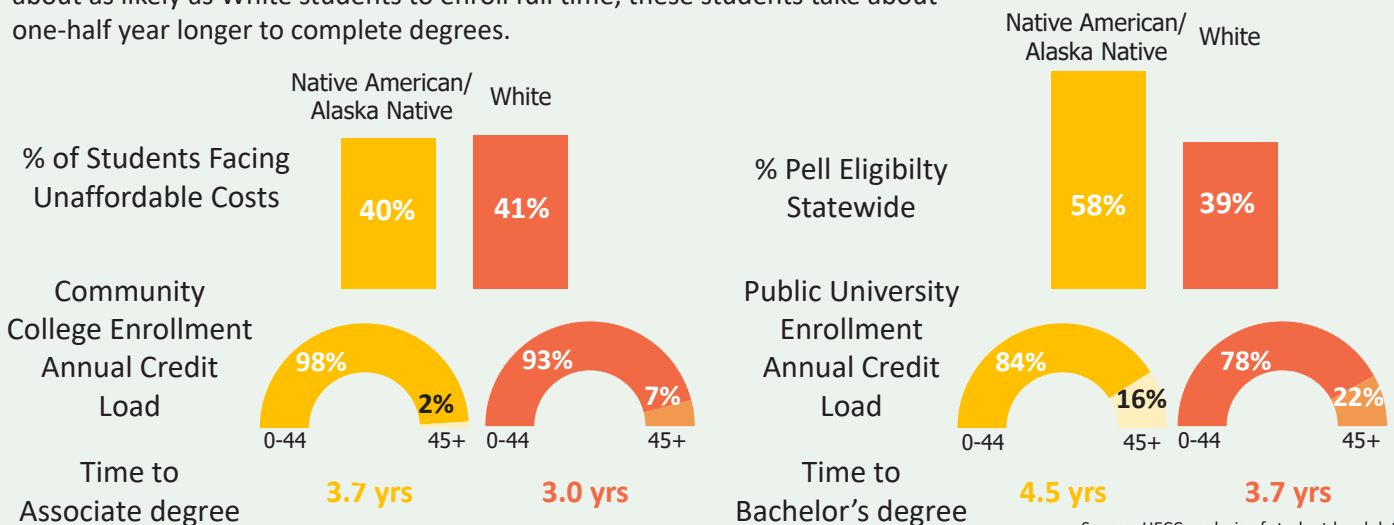


Source: Oregon Department of Education and HECC analysis of student-level data.

**“They are going because they know how to learn but they are leaving because they don’t have the connections with their culture. How do we get the culture translated onto the campus?” - Summer**

## Paying for School is a Barrier for Many Native American/Alaska Native Students

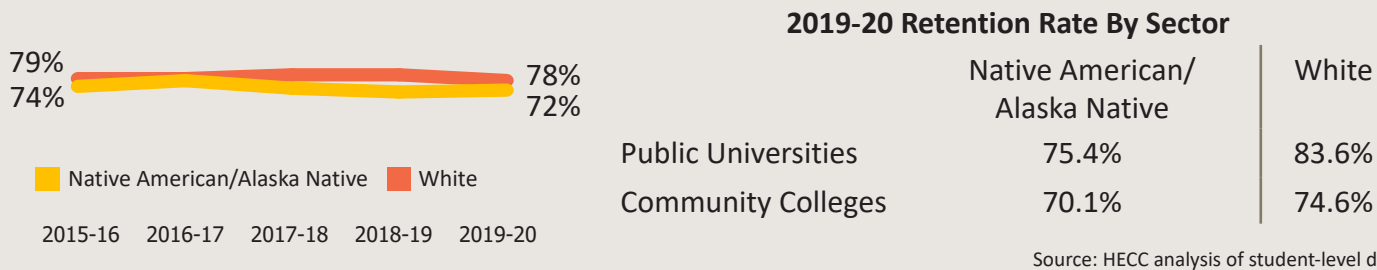
Nearly half of both Native American/Alaska Native and White students in Oregon's public colleges and universities face educational costs that are higher than their expected resources (grants and scholarships, most institutional aid, expected family contribution, and estimated student earnings). These similar rates are despite Native American/Alaska Native students' greater likelihood of coming from low-income backgrounds (measured with Pell eligibility). Thus, federal, state, institution, and private grants and scholarships are one way to support Native American/Alaska Native student success. Affordability worsens the longer it takes to earn a credential, as costs rise and the higher wages that come with the certificate or degree are postponed. Though Native American/Alaska Native students are about as likely as White students to enroll full time, these students take about one-half year longer to complete degrees.



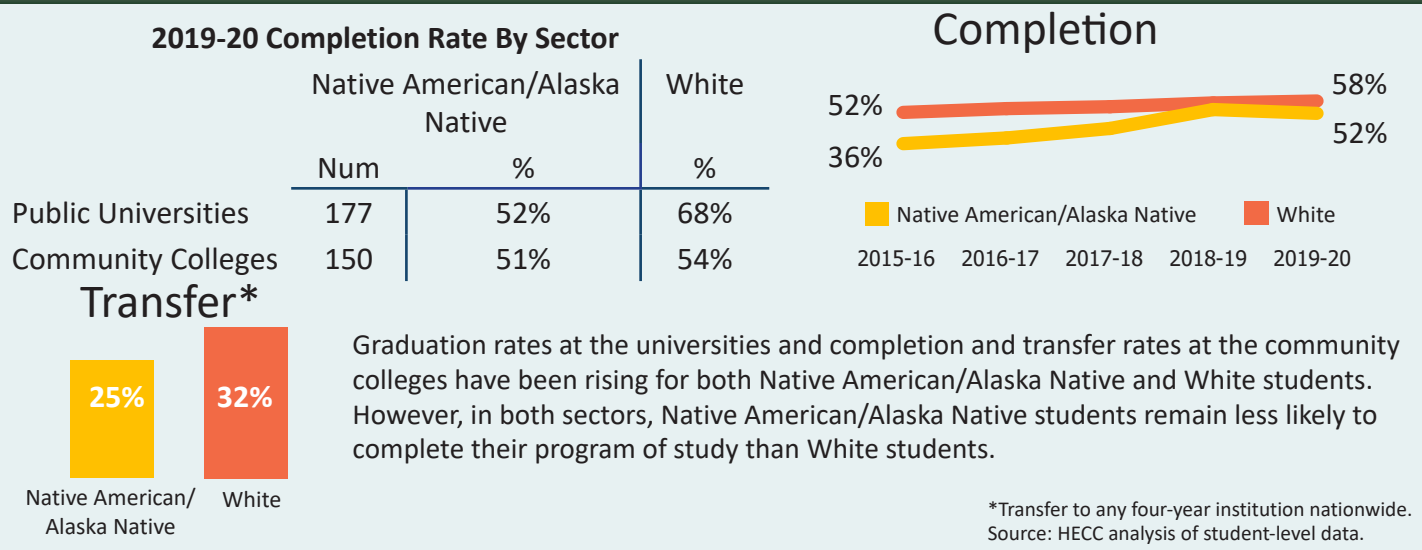
Source: HECC analysis of student-level data.

## Institutions Retain Fewer Native American/Alaska Native Students

Fewer Native American/Alaska Native students return after their first year in college or university than their White counterparts. How many students return after their first year in college or university (the retention rate) is one indicator of the obstacles students face, which may include financial need, cultural isolation, academic challenge, and competing obligations outside of school.



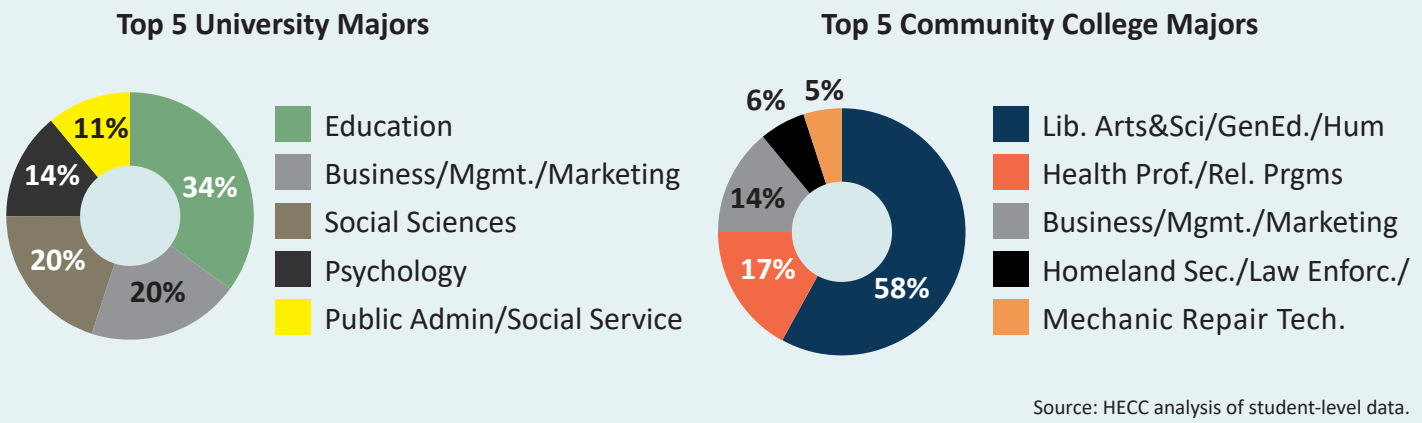
## Graduation and Transfer Rates are Lower for Native American/Alaska Native Students



“I think it comes off as you can get all these scholarships as Native American...my tribe is small. You don’t realize it...they don’t get that. I’m lucky to have gotten what I’ve gotten.” - Summer

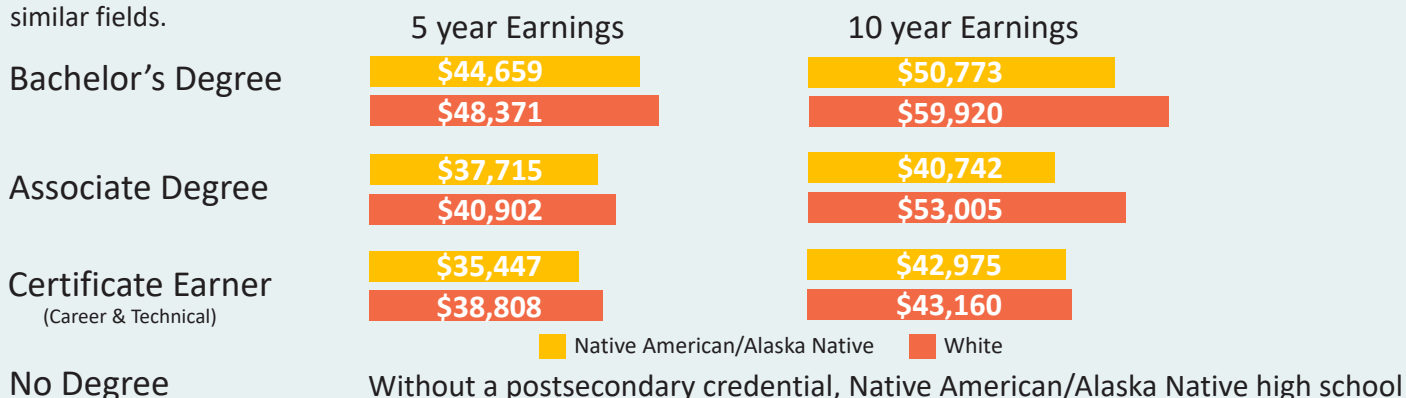
## Top Majors Among Native American/Alaska Native Students

Native American/Alaska Native students earn certificates and degrees in areas that are similar to those earned by White students.



## Long-term Outcomes for Native American/Alaska Native Students

Both Native American/Alaska Native and White students who graduate from Oregon's public colleges and universities experience the higher earnings and lower unemployment that postsecondary credentials bring. However, earnings outcomes are lower for Native American/Alaska Native graduates than for White graduates, despite graduating in similar fields.



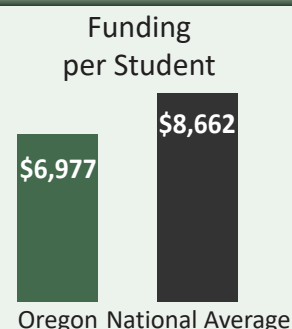
**No Degree** Without a postsecondary credential, Native American/Alaska Native high school graduates earn about half as much as those with a bachelor's degree earn\*

\* National data for adults age 25 to 34 employed full-time, year-round.

Source: HECC analysis of student-level data matched with wage records from Oregon Employment Dept. for assoc. and bach. degree graduates. Includes those employed in Oregon. National Center for Education Statistics data for high school graduates, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator\\_rfd.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rfd.asp)

## State Investment in Higher Education and Training

One way to close equity gaps in education is to invest in student outcomes. Research shows that nationally and in Oregon, increasing student financial aid increases successful completion of postsecondary programs. However, Oregon lags in per capita funding of postsecondary education and training for both students and institutions, as indicated in the chart to the right. In addition, recent evidence shows that low-income students who receive Oregon's financial aid grants are more likely than other low-income students to complete their program of study. These programs disproportionately serve Native American/Alaska Native students. For example, 27% of Native American/Alaska Native students received an Oregon Opportunity Grant, compared to 24% of White students (among FAFSA filers) at all Oregon institutions.



Sources: Nguyen, T. D., Kramer, J. W., & Evans, B. J. (2019). The Effects of Grant Aid on Student Persistence and Degree Attainment: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Causal Evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(6), 831-874. Higher Education Coordinating Commission (Cox et al). Annual Evaluation of the Oregon Opportunity Grant: House Bill 2407 (2015), 2021. Data show funding per full-time equivalent student and are from State Higher Education Executive Officers, *State Higher Education Finance Report*, 2020.

## The Work in Front of Us...

The discrete measures and charts in this research brief give only a glimpse into students' experiences. Yet even this glimpse indicates there is work to do to make the benefits of postsecondary education and training experienced equitably across Oregon. Structural investments in culturally responsive systems, financial aid, and community and student engagement can shift student trajectories to more equitable outcomes. Some of this work includes:

- **Build** on the diversity, equity, and inclusion standards for an inclusive campus culture required at all community colleges and public universities by House Bill 2864, 2017. We need to ensure the standards are fully implemented and used and have the resources needed to create culturally responsive pedagogies and safe environments for students, faculty, and staff.
- **Increase** financial aid for students. State grants increase retention and completion and disproportionately support Native American/Alaska Native students.
- **Engage** culturally specific community organizations and students in the postsecondary enterprise as key partners to serve learners better.
- **Improve** coordination across institutions and across the K-12, community college, and public university sectors to increase college-going rates, transfer, and graduation and to reduce the time to completion.

Let us know how we can improve this report. [info@hecc.oregon.gov](mailto:info@hecc.oregon.gov)

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