

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NATIVE HAWAIIANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A CALL TO
ACTION



BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs) have been largely invisible in policy considerations at the federal, state, and local levels, and in the development of campus services and programs. This is driven, in part, by a lack of knowledge about the needs, challenges, and experiences of NHPI students, particularly with regard to the wide range of social and institutional contexts in which they pursue their educational aspirations. This report is a response to a dearth of knowledge about the demography of NHPI students, their educational trajectory, and their postsecondary outcomes. Specifically, we build on prior research by providing a portrait of NHPI students in American higher education in the continental U.S. and the U.S. affiliated islands throughout the Pacific region.¹

The report responds to the following research questions:

1. What are the trends in college participation and degree attainment for NHPI students?
2. How does NHPI college participation and degree attainment vary by different institutional sectors (e.g., two-year or four-year; public or private) and types (e.g., Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions [AANAPISIs])?
3. In what ways, if at all, is geography (e.g., Pacific Islands vs. continental U.S.) a factor in understanding the distribution of NHPI postsecondary enrollment?

There are more than 20 NHPI ethnic sub-groups recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau.² Polynesians include individuals who identify as Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Tahitian, Tongan, and Tokelauan. Micronesians include individuals who identify as Guamanian or Chamorro, Mariana Islander, Saipanese, Palauan, Carolinian, Kosraean, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Marshallese, and I-Kiribati. Melanesians include individuals who identify as Fijian, Papua New Guinean, Solomon Islander, and Ni-Vanuatu.



TRENDS IN NHPI COLLEGE PARTICIPATION AND DEGREE ATTAINMENT

College participation remains a persistent challenge for the NHPI community.

While the proportion of total U.S. population that has attended college is 54.9%, it is 47.0% for the NHPI population.

The proportion of NHPI adults who have not enrolled in any postsecondary education is particularly high for NHPI ethnic sub-groups, including 57.9% of Samoans, 56.8% of Tongans, 53.0% of Native Hawaiians, and 49.3% of Guamanians or Chamorros.

NHPI students who attend college have the highest attrition rates of any ethnic sub-group in the AAPI community. A significant proportion of Samoans (58.1%), Tongans (54.2%), Native Hawaiians (50.0%), and Guamanians or Chamorros (47.0%) who attended college, left without earning a college degree.

In three-year American Community Survey data (2011–2013), the national bachelor's degree attainment rate was 29.1%, which was greater than the bachelor's degree attainment rate for Native Hawaiians (20.5%), Guamanians or Chamorros (18.6%), Samoans (13.4%), and Tongans (12.3%).

INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION OF NHPI STUDENTS

The distribution of NHPI enrollment in different institutional sectors (e.g., two-year or four-year; public or private) and types (e.g., AANAPISIs) is revealing and provides context for understanding the enrollment and educational trajectory of NHPI students.

While NHPI enrollment has declined from 2012–2013 to 2016–2017 (-17.2%), one counterintuitive finding in our analysis is that NHPI enrollment has declined more in two-year institutions (-29.9%) than four-year institutions (-4.3%).

While NHPI enrollment is declining in public institutions (-22.3%), their enrollment in private institutions tells a different story; among the top 25 institutions with regard to NHPI enrollment, more than half ($n = 13$) are private institutions.

Private for-profit institutions are the only sector of higher education that had an increase in enrollment at 40.3%, which is an important finding considering private for-profit institutions have been scrutinized for their low degree completion rates, high tuition, and high proportion of students who are carrying high levels of debt.³

A critical mass of NHPI enrollment can be found in AANAPISIs (38.1%), which make these institutions critical sites for serving the NHPI community.

AANAPISIs also confer a disproportionately high concentration of associate's (43.6%) and bachelor's degrees (27.1%) to NHPI students.



One possible explanation for the significant decline in NHPI student enrollment can be that many NHPI students identify as multiracial and multiethnic.⁴ With 50% of the NHPI population identifying as multiracial in the 2010 Census, the new “two or more races” data category in IPEDS can be disrupting racial and ethnic trend analysis, which can impact how enrollment trends are being understood by researchers and policymakers.⁵ This is evident in the significant increase in enrollment for the “two or more races” category, which increased by 34.9% between 2012–2013 and 2015–2016.

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION OF NHPI STUDENTS

Regional analysis of NHPI enrollment in higher education also point to the importance of geography for understanding college access and success.

The top five institutions in terms of total NHPI enrollment are all located in the Pacific Islands (College of Micronesia, University of Guam, Guam Community College, American Samoa Community College, and the College of the Marshall Islands), enrolling nearly 1-in-5 NHPI college students in the nation.

NHPI undergraduate enrollment on the continental U.S. ($n = 53,066$) was nearly *four times* greater than NHPI undergraduate enrollment in Hawai'i or the Pacific ($n = 14,748$).

The NHPI population on the continental U.S. is increasing at a faster rate than in Hawai'i or the Pacific. For example, while Hawai'i is home to the largest number of NHPI residents in the U.S., the five states with the fastest rate of growth between 2000 and 2010 were Arkansas (151%), Nevada (102%), Alaska (102%), Arizona (87%), and Alabama (87%).

There is a particular need for attention to NHPI youth in communities where there is a critical mass of NHPI residents. The NHPI bachelor's degree attainment rate is disproportionately low in Los Angeles (20%), Seattle (15%), Las Vegas (11%), and Salt Lake City (9%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should explore reasons why NHPI student enrollment trends exist for particular higher education sectors (e.g., community colleges where enrollment has declined at a particularly high rate, private for-profit institutions where enrollment has increased, etc.).

With a disproportionately high concentration of NHPI enrollment and degree conferrals at AANAPISIs, practices and services for NHPI students (e.g., as incubators for best practices, their ability to leverage status and funding to bring attention to NHPI students, etc.) should be explored at these institutions, as well as at Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions.

There are key institutions in the Pacific region with high concentrations of NHPI enrollment that are anchor sites for cross-enrollment, transferring, and other formal connections for other institutions in the region that need attention in research, policy, and in the development of campus services.

Data points to important regional sites on the continental U.S. (e.g., Long Beach, Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Seattle, etc.) where there is a need for a deeper understanding of and attention to college access and success for NHPI students. More research should focus on the role of colleges and universities for being mindful of and responsive to migration patterns, displacement, religion, and familial commitments as considerations for regional access to education.

While this report disaggregated data for NHPI ethnic sub-groups, there is a need for further disaggregation of data to look at gender differences in higher education enrollment, degree attainment, and the overall educational trajectory of NHPI students.

More analysis of particular entry points for NHPI students in higher education and if these are factors in their educational trajectory (e.g., athletics, online programs, etc.) is needed in future scholarship.

Future research should critically examine the relationship of these educational trends within the lens of settler-colonialism, imperialism, militarism, etc. to further situate the experiences of NHPIs as it relates to postsecondary access, college choice, and academic success.

CONTRIBUTORS

This report was made possible by a collaborative effort between Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) Scholars and the Institute for Immigration, Globalization, and Education (IGE) at the University of California, Los Angeles. We are indebted to our funder, Kresge Foundation, for their generous support for this endeavor. The authors of this report are Robert T. Teranishi, Annie Le, Rose Ann E. Gutierrez, Rikka Venturanza, 'Inoke Hafoka, Demeturie Toso-Lafaele Gogue, and Lavinia Uluave. Photos Courtesy of Bryson Kim.

ENDNOTES

1. Data from this report relied on two main sources: the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).
2. L. Hixson, B. B. Hepler, & M. O. Kim, *The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Population* (Washington, D. C.: United States Census Bureau, 2015).
3. D. J. Deming, C. Goldin, & L. F. Katz. "The For-Profit Postsecondary School Sector: Nimble Critters or Agile Predators?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26, no. 1 (2012): 139-164.
4. Empowering Pacific Islander Communities, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States* (Los Angeles, CA: Author, 2014); P. R. Spickard, & R. Fong, "Pacific Islander Americans and Multiethnicity: A Vision of America's Future," *Social Forces* 73, no. 4 (1995): 1365-1384; P. Spickard, "Who is Asian? Who is Pacific Islander? Monoracialism, Multiracial People, and Asian American communities," *The Sum of our parts: Mixed-heritage Asian Americans*, ed. Teresa Williams-Leon, Cynthia L. Nakashima, & Michael Omi (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).
5. Y. M. Kim, *Minorities in Higher Education: Twenty-Fourth Status Report* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2011).

