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The Campaign for College Opportunity

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COMMISSION ON
ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER
AMERICAN AFFAIRS

THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Californians

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

The California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs (CAPIAA) is proud to partner with the Campaign for College Opportunity for the release of the State of Higher Education for AANHPI Californians Report, a critical examination of the educational landscape for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) students across California. California is home to one of the largest and most diverse AANHPI populations in the nation.

While AANHPI communities are often viewed through a narrow lens of aggregate success, this report makes clear that such narratives obscure profound disparities in access, opportunity, and outcomes. AANHPI students are not a monolith, and equity cannot be achieved without acknowledging the distinct experiences of many, including Southeast Asian and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. This is reflected in persistent gaps in student outcomes.

The State of Higher Education for AANHPI Californians Report underscores the urgent need for disaggregated data and targeted, equity-driven policies. The findings highlight systemic barriers that affect students throughout their educational journey, from preparation and access to persistence, transfer, and degree completion.

Ensuring access is only the first step. California must also commit to supporting AANHPI students through completion and into pathways that lead to meaningful economic mobility. Without this, inequities persist, limiting the full potential of our communities and our state.

CAPIAA remains committed to advancing policies that ensure AANHPI communities are fully seen and meaningfully supported. This report sheds light on the real challenges AANHPI students face and reinforces the importance of data-informed solutions. Efforts to strengthen how data is collected and reported across state agencies as well as equipping institutions to better support AANHPI student success. Together, these efforts ensure AANHPI students are not only counted but intentionally supported.

We are grateful to the Campaign for College Opportunity for their partnership in advancing educational equity across California. We hope this report serves as a practical toolkit for policymakers to advance student-centered policies that reflect the lived experiences of AANHPI students and drive more equitable outcomes across our higher education system.

Khydeeja Alam
Executive Director,
Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs

INTRODUCTION

California's Asian American and Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) populations increased by 25% over the past decade,[1] making them the fastest growing racial or ethnic group in the state.[2] Accounting for over 6 million people across the state, AANHPI Californians are a crucial element of the state's social, cultural, and economic fabric.

Often AANHPI students are perceived as uniformly high achieving, with aggregate data frequently reinforcing an image of broad academic success. However, these averages obscure significant disparities within this incredibly diverse student population in terms of access to higher education and outcomes after enrollment. The persistence of this model minority myth harms AANHPI students, obscures their needs and limits the ability of college leaders and policymakers to effectively design strategies to support them.

The disaggregated data presented in this report reveals enormous variation within the AANHPI student body in college preparation, enrollment, and completion. Labeling these disparities as achievement gaps wrongly places the burden on Asian American students, rather than on the systems that enable inequity, while neglecting the needs of the state's Southeast Asian and NHPI students, whose educational outcomes often are more similar to those of their Black and Latinx peers than other AANHPI groups. This report highlights areas of progress and persistent inequities for AANHPI students across California's higher education systems and situates these outcomes within broader institutional contexts.

The Campaign for College Opportunity's State of Higher Education for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders report serves as a call to action for policymakers, institutional leaders, and advocates to take meaningful, student-centered steps to better support AANHPI students in achieving their educational goals. A renewed commitment to closing equity gaps in college access and completion is essential to California's economic future and to building a more inclusive and prosperous state.

THE GOOD NEWS:

- Over the past five years, bachelor's degree attainment for working age adults has risen by five percentage points for Asian Americans and three points for NHPI Californians, reflecting steady upward progress.
- A majority (61%) of working-age Asian American Californians hold a bachelor's degree or above, demonstrating a high level of educational attainment.
- Asian American (93%) and Filipino (95%) high school students lead the state in four-year graduation rates. The graduation rate for NHPI students is 86%, a four-percentage point increase since 2021.
- AANHPI students are well-represented across California's higher education systems relative to their share of the state's young adult population.
- Following reforms to reduce remedial education, Asian American students' completion rates for transfer-level community college courses have skyrocketed, increasing by 28 and 18 percentage points for transfer-level math and English, respectively.
- Nearly three in four (73%) Asian American California State University (CSU) freshmen graduate within six years.
- Asian American and NHPI CSU and University of California (UC) graduates earn more than the median California wage within two years of graduation.
- AANHPI graduates recoup their educational costs within one to two years of graduating from public colleges and universities.

THE BAD NEWS:

- Just 22% of NHPI working-age adults and fewer than 30% of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian adults were supported to earn a bachelor's degree, well below the statewide average of 37%.
- In 2025, only 44% of NHPI high school graduates completed their A-G requirements, a rate that has not improved since 2021.
- A NHPI student is five times less likely than an Asian American student to enroll in a UC, and an NHPI student is nearly four times as likely to enroll in a for-profit college as an Asian American student.
- In the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, no NHPI student group has a higher six-year completion rate than any individual Asian American subgroup.

- **Asian American students at the CCC transfer at higher rates after four years than NHPI students do after six years.**
- **There remains a 17-percentage point equity gap between the six-year graduation rates for Asian American and NHPI freshmen at the CSU and a 13-point gap for UC freshmen.**
- **About one in five Southeast Asian and NHPI children in California grows up in poverty.**
- **Asian American and NHPI students remain substantially less likely to see themselves reflected among their faculty than white students across California's public higher education system.**
- **Private colleges with high shares of NHPI enrollment have much higher costs with few corresponding earnings gains for graduates. As a result, graduates take three to four times longer than those from public colleges to recoup their educational investment.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the Campaign for College Opportunity proposes the following recommendations for California's policymakers, advocates, and educational leaders.

State Recommendations

- Direct the California Education Interagency Council to design state educational attainment, equity, and workforce goals for AANHPI students, using disaggregated data to identify educational equity gaps and produce targeted, equity-driven policies across the CCC, CSU, and UC that support AANHPI student success.
    - In collaboration with the council, the CCC, CSU, and UC should establish annual and long-term goals to improve transfer, time to degree, and completion rates for AANHPI students, with a focus on increasing bachelor's degree completion rates for Southeast Asian and NHPI students.
    - The council should guide intersegmental efforts to move toward an A-G default curriculum for the state's high school graduation requirements, aiming to increase the percentage of NHPI students eligible for admission to the state's four-year public universities.

- Expand access to the full A-G, 15-course sequence for all California high school students by increasing college preparatory course availability and hiring more credentialed teachers to help students complete the curriculum required for admission to UC and CSU institutions.
- Ensure the CCC is maximizing placement of AANHPI students on its Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) pathway to improve overall transfer and completion rates, close racial and ethnic gaps, and support them in earning degrees and enrolling at CSU and UC campuses.
- Modernize California's financial aid system by enacting recent expansions to the Cal Grant and shifting to a state aid model based on student need.
- Increase the number of AANHPI high school seniors completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the California Dream Act Application (CADAA) to ensure equitable access to higher education regardless of income and aim to exceed the current statewide FAFSA/CADAA completion rate of 60% across all racial groups.
- Continue to develop robust California Cradle-to-Career (C2C) Data System that enables policymakers and institutions to better understand and address variation in college access and success among AANHPI students.
    - Require that the CCC, CSU, and UC systems provide disaggregated data to C2C on college access and success outcomes for distinct student groups within the AANHPI population, enabling C2C to develop data tools that allow inform targeted, equity-driven policies and practices for AANHPI students.
- Ensure that the governing bodies of California's public higher education systems reflect the diversity of the students and the state by appointing AANHPI representatives to the UC Board of Regents, CSU Board of Trustees, CCC Board of Governors, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), and the California Education Interagency Council.
- Support AB 2374 (Fong), which would establish California's first AANHPI-Serving Institution designation. This designation would uplift crucial evidence-based practices successful in supporting our AANHPI students; collect the data necessary to address equity gaps within the AANHPI student population; and incentivize our institutions to sustain their commitment to serving our AANHPI students from enrollment to completion and beyond.

Community College and University Recommendations

- College presidents, campus leaders, and governing boards should emphasize the intentional recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of AANHPI faculty members across California's public colleges and universities.
- Collect and utilize standardized, consistently reported disaggregated data by race/ethnicity within the AANHPI student population.
- Strengthen equitable placement and completion reforms at California's community colleges by supporting all students, particularly AANHPI and other minoritized students, to complete transfer-level English and math within one year.

High School Recommendations

- Collect and utilize standardized disaggregated data by race/ethnicity within the AANHPI student population in the California School Dashboard.
- Boost A-G completion rates for NHPI students by expanding access to college preparatory courses, increasing the availability of A-G classes, and providing academic support and counseling, while monitoring disaggregated data on course completion, graduation, and college enrollment to identify and address gaps.
- Provide ongoing professional development for teachers in culturally responsive and multilingual instruction to build their knowledge about and help them better support multilingual learners, with the goal of narrowing the academic disparities between students identified as English learners (ELs) and their peers.
- Facilitate partnerships between high schools and local colleges to expand dual enrollment opportunities aligned with ADT pathways, Cal-GETC (California General Education Transfer Curriculum), and summer bridge programs, giving NHPI students early exposure to college-level coursework, campus life, and resources to support their academic readiness and success.
- Strengthen Southeast Asian and NHPI family engagement initiatives that educate parents and guardians about navigating higher education pathways and financial aid options, including information provided to students and families about career pathways, on-campus FAFSA and CADAA workshops and informational sessions.
- Ensure that all high school seniors complete either the FAFSA or the CADAA, so that every talented AANHPI Californian has the opportunity to pursue college, regardless of income.

Federal Recommendations

- Enact a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented individuals, including DACA recipients.
- Repeal 8 U.S.C. § 1611[3] and 8 U.S.C. § 1621[4] of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which prohibits undocumented individuals from accessing federal public benefits, including higher education benefits.
- Maintain and increase funding for Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISIs) to continue the mission of the federal minority-serving institution (MSI) designations of equalizing educational opportunity for historically minoritized students in higher education.
- Expand reporting within the U.S. Department of Education College Scorecard to include reports on institutional effectiveness in serving AANHPI students, among other minoritized student populations, in the areas of college access and persistence/completion. Reporting should specifically include the following metrics, and K-12 federal reporting metrics for this student population should be consistent statewide:
    - graduation rates for enrolled transfer students disaggregated by race/ethnicity within the AANHPI student population
    - return on investment (ROI) data disaggregated by race/ethnicity within the AANHPI student population
    - information on campus student support programs used to assess effectiveness and guide best practices for AANHPI student success
    - qualitative data that captures student testimonies on the impact of campus student success initiatives
- Continue to limit federal financial aid to for-profit colleges and universities that fail to meet the gainful employment rule established by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2023 that requires:
    - The debt-to-earnings test: A graduate's average annual loan payment must not exceed 8% of their annual earnings or 20% of their discretionary earnings. Institutions that surpass this threshold may be deemed ineligible for federal aid.
    - The earnings premium threshold: Three years after graduation, the average earnings of graduates must be at least equal to the average earnings of high school graduates ages 25–34 in the same state who never enrolled in postsecondary education.

A Note on Sample Size

It is crucial to keep in mind that small sample sizes are subject to greater variability and as such should be interpreted with caution. According to the 2019-2023 American Community Survey, approximately 457,386 Asian American and 12,309 NHPI residents are within the traditional 18-24 college-aged population in California.[5] However, when broken down by specific ancestries or ethnicities, these numbers can shrink very quickly for certain groups. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the Bhutanese, Sri Lankan, Mongolian, Marshallese, and Malaysian populations have fewer than 1,000 college-aged residents each in the state and these sample size gets even smaller when examining only those enrolled in higher education.[6] In very small groups, a handful of students can shift the group average by a wide margin; therefore, significant shifts over just a few years should be considered with care.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The educational journeys of AANHPI communities today are downstream of the distinct historical pathways through which different populations found themselves in the United States, shaped by exclusion, colonization, war, demand for cheap labor, and refugee resettlement programs. Early East Asian immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, largely as laborers. They confronted severe racial discrimination, legal exclusion, and barriers to land ownership and citizenship that have constrained their economic mobility and educational access for generations. For Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, colonization, land dispossession, and cultural suppression produced enduring structural barriers to educational opportunity.

Post-1965 immigration reforms prioritized highly educated and skilled professionals from countries such as India, China, and the Philippines, creating streams of immigrants with high levels of formal education, professional networks, and economic resources that translated quickly into strong academic outcomes

within a single generation. Meanwhile, many Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos arrived fleeing war, political upheaval, environmental displacement, and economic marginalization. They often had limited formal schooling and few financial resources and were more likely to settle in under-resourced communities and schools.

The contrast of these two stories was instrumental in the development of the pernicious "model minority" myth that selectively elevated the success of certain Asian immigrant groups to portray Asian Americans as uniformly high-achieving, self-sufficient, and upwardly mobile. The myth also has been used to suggest that racial inequality can be overcome solely through individual effort, implicitly blaming Black, Latinx and American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities for persistent disparities affecting them, and diverting attention from systemic inequalities embedded in housing, labor markets, and education. For AANHPI communities, the myth masks deep internal inequities, limits access to targeted support services by perpetuating the perception that they are unnecessary, and contributes to the chronic underfunding and invisibility of AANHPI groups that face significant educational and economic hardship.

Together, these divergent historical experiences — rooted in immigration policy, geopolitical realities, and racial hierarchy — continue to shape patterns of school readiness, academic achievement, and college access across California, revealing profound inequalities often masked by aggregated data. For a deeper dive into this topic, check out pages 15-17 of the previous edition of this report.

"As a Hmong American woman, I have often been grouped into the broad 'Asian' category in ways that do not reflect my culture, history, or lived experience, overshadowing the distinct challenges my community faces."

Lisa Xiong
Graduate, CSU Fresno

Data Availability for AANHPI Californians

Asian American and NHPI communities in California are highly diverse, yet in many cases their data is often aggregated within just one or two racial/ethnic categories, which can mask substantial differences in educational access and outcomes. Disaggregating data is a crucial step toward deepening understanding of our students' educational journeys and providing policymakers with the tools to make properly informed decisions.

The availability of disaggregated data varies considerably by data source. Through resources such as its American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau has been collecting disaggregated data on AANHPI populations for over two decades. The survey allows respondents to choose from 20 Asian American and six NHPI ethnicity categories, along with “Other Asian” or “Other Pacific Islander” options, and as of 2022 that data was added to publicly available tables.[7]

Both the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the California Department of Education (CDE) have far less robust systems. Since 2008, the NCES’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), a primary source for this report’s higher education data, has separated Asian American and NHPI, but as of now does not disaggregate further. The CDE — a primary source for this report’s high school data — is similarly limited, with the sole exception of Filipino student data, which it collects.

Current efforts to expand disaggregated data nationally through IPEDS have been plagued by unclear reporting requirements and impractical timelines.[8] Additionally, these efforts have been stated to be directly in service of[9] confirming systemic enforcement of the Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard Supreme Court decision[10] rather than reflecting the experiences of minoritized students.

The UC, CSU, and CCC each collects more disaggregated data, but these systems vary in terms of the subgroup data collected, which metrics disaggregated data is collected for, and to what degree that data is publicly available. As IPEDS collects data directly from higher education systems and institutions, adding disaggregated data requirements would effectively standardize some data collection practices across the systems.

Alternatively, California's C2C Data System presents a promising in-state mechanism to advance data disaggregation and alignment across segments. Designed to connect data from early childhood through K-12, higher education, and workforce systems, C2C launched its first public data tool in 2025,[11] visually illustrating student pathways from high school graduation to college completion. In its initial release, the racial/ethnic categories are limited to broad groups, including "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander". Expanding subgroup representation will be critical to more accurately identify disparities in educational outcomes.

With the sole exception of the CCC, which began collecting data for additional subgroups in 2018, **there have been no advances in disaggregated data collection by any of these sources in recent years**. For each figure in this report, disaggregated data for as many subgroups with sufficient samples is provided. For a full list of which sources collect data on which subgroups, please see Table 1 from our 2022 report.

"As a Filipino immigrant, I feel that my needs (and those of other Filipino students) have always been an afterthought, tucked away in aggregated data."

Jiro Claveria
UC Santa Cruz

ASIAN AMERICAN AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER CALIFORNIANS

Nearly 7.5 million Californians identified as either Asian American or NHPI, in 2024[12] alone or in combination with another racial/ethnic group, making up just under one out of every five people in the state. California is home to 6.1 million residents who identify as Asian, roughly triple that of the next largest population in New York, and almost one-third of the nationwide total of 20 million.[13] The state is also home to the country's largest NHPI population, with about 148,000 residents identifying as such; only Hawaii has a comparable NHPI population. An additional 1 million Asian and 190,000 NHPI Californians come from multiracial backgrounds. NHPI Californians are the most likely group to identify as multiracial, with 56% of them doing so.

Chinese Americans remain the largest Asian subgroup in California, having surpassed Filipino Americans in the late 2010s. Over 80% of the state's Asian Americans identify as either Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, or Korean. While the largest NHPI groups statewide are Samoan and Fijian Americans, at nearly 25% and 21%, respectively, the U.S. Census Bureau reports six different NHPI ethnicities and a few broader ancestry origins (e.g., Polynesian and Micronesian).

There are 22 distinct AANHPI ethnic groups with population sizes of 10,000 or more in California.

Table 1: AANHPI Ethnicity Population Sizes and Share of Statewide Population.

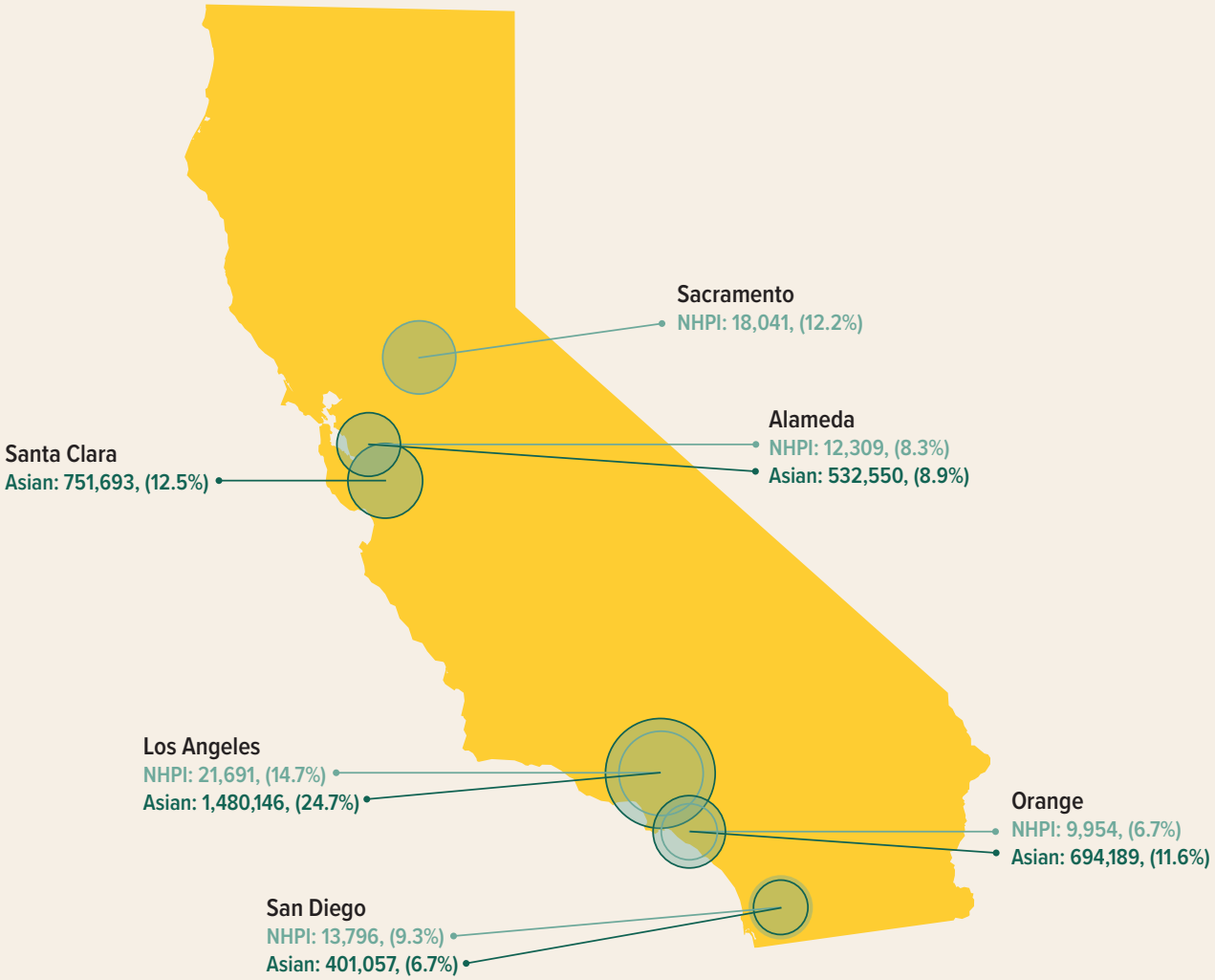
Ethnic Group	Population Count	% within Asian/NHPI alone	% of AANHPI population
Chinese	1,510,492	25.6%	25.0%
Filipino	1,240,120	21.0%	20.5%
Indian	867,964	14.7%	14.4%
Vietnamese	683,877	11.6%	11.3%
Korean	466,106	7.9%	7.7%
Japanese	234,617	4.0%	3.9%
Taiwanese	111,682	1.9%	1.8%
Hmong	102,052	1.7%	1.7%
Cambodian	95,743	1.6%	1.6%
Pakistani	72,606	1.2%	1.2%
Thai	50,723	0.9%	0.8%
Laotian	45,534	0.8%	0.8%
Samoan	33,319	24.9%	0.6%
Indonesian	29,727	0.5%	0.5%
Fijian	27,734	20.7%	0.5%
Burmese	19,440	0.3%	0.3%
Tongan	18,754	14.0%	0.3%
Nepalese	17,944	0.3%	0.3%
Bangladeshi	16,205	0.3%	0.3%
Native Hawaiian	16,201	12.1%	0.3%
Chamorro	16,138	12.0%	0.3%
Sri Lankan	12,641	0.2%	0.2%
Mongolian	7,888	0.1%	0.1%
Malaysian	4,003	0.1%	0.1%
Marshallese	2,809	2.1%	<0.1%
Bhutanese	161	<0.1%	<0.1%

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019-2023, 5-year Public Use Microdata Sample.

The majority of Asian Americans and NHPI Californians live in a handful of large metro areas, including Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and San Diego regions.

The majority of AANHPI Californians live in just six metro areas.

Figure 1. Asian Americans and NHPIs in California by County.

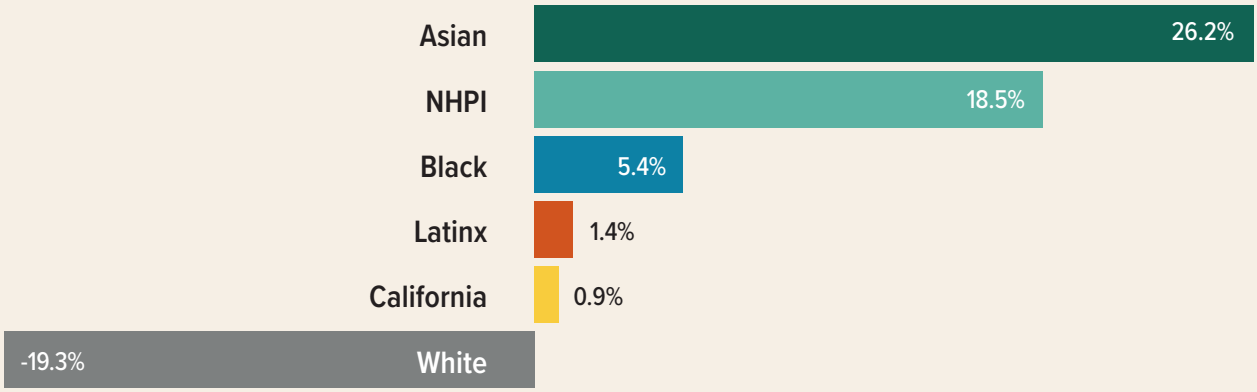


Source: US Census Bureau (2026). American Community Survey 2019-2023 Five-Year Estimates. Table B02001 Race.

In the coming decades, Asian American and NHPI populations are projected to grow faster than any other single racial/ethnic group in California, increasing by 2070 by 26.2% and 18.5%, respectively. This means that in the next 75 years, the state's Asian American population will grow 26 times that of the rate of the state as a whole. The California Department of Finance projects that most of this growth will occur by the 2050s and stabilize thereafter.

Californian AANHPI populations are projected to grow substantially in the coming decades.

Figure 2. Percent Population Growth by Race and Hispanic Origin, CA, 2024 to 2070.

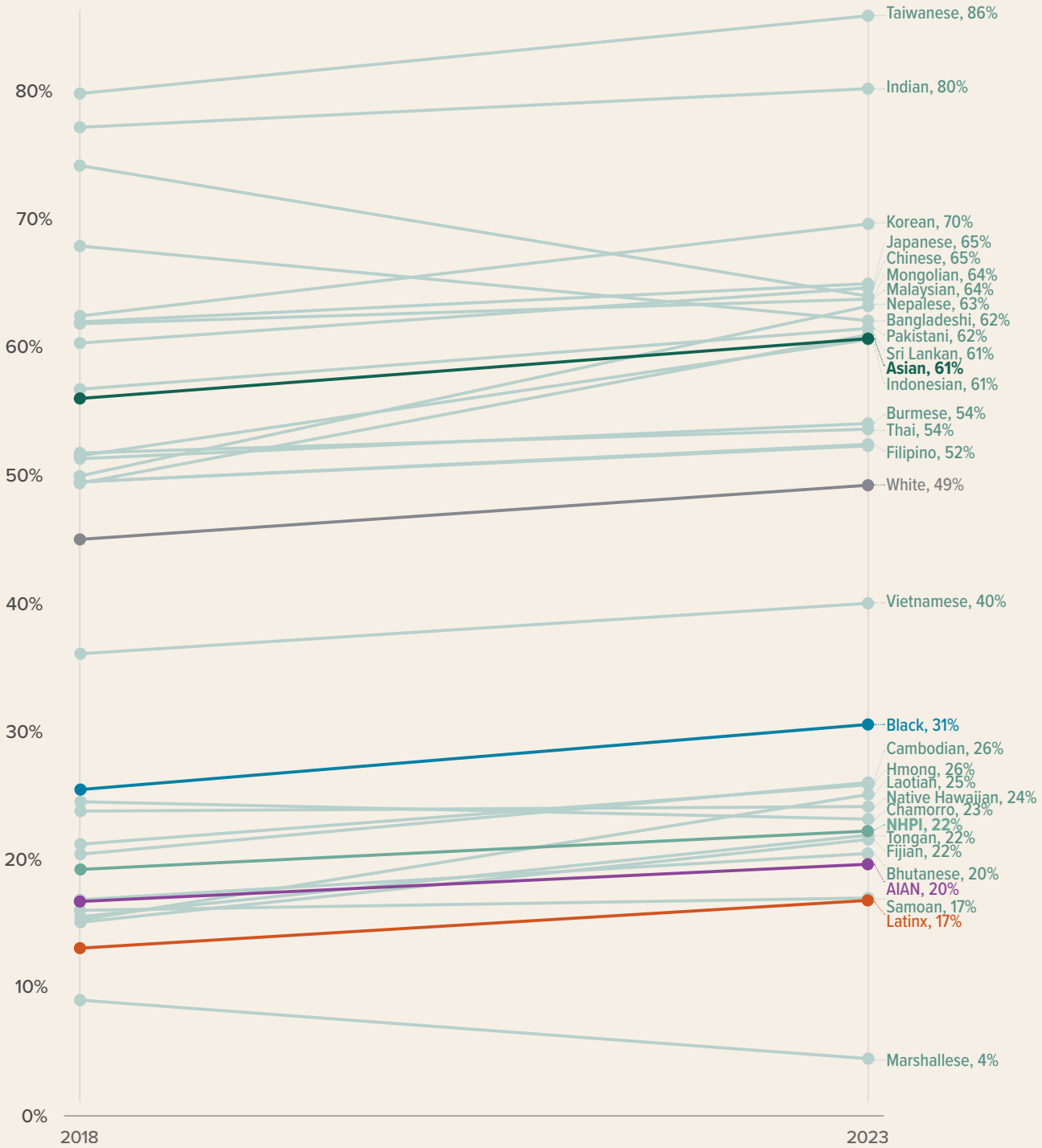


Source: California Department of Finance. (2026). Population Projections, Vintage 2025 Total Population by Race/Ethnicity.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Bachelor's degree attainment rose for both NHPI Californians (19% to 22%) and Asian Californians (57% to 61%) between 2018 and 2023, but the attainment gap remains stable.

Figure 3. BA/BS Attainment in California Among Asian American, NHPI, and Selected Subgroups, Ages 25-64.



Note: Differences between the 2014-2018 ACS 5-year estimates and 2019-2023 ACS 5-year estimates may be the result of demographic changes and/or differences in question wording, race reporting, or coding updates.
Source: US Census Bureau. (2026). 2015-2019 and 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Samples.

The rate of working-age Asian American and NHPI Californians with a bachelor's degree varies dramatically by ethnicity. Sixty-one percent of the state's Asian Americans hold a bachelor's degree or higher, while just 22% of NHPI Californians do. However, these broad figures mask substantial disparities within each community. The vast majority of Taiwanese (86%) and Indian (80%) Californians have a bachelor's degree, while only about one-quarter of Hmong (26%) and Laotian Californians (25%) can say the same, with their rates more in line with Black and Latinx Californians than with the overall Asian American population. Bachelor's degree attainment levels are lower still for some NHPI groups, including Samoan (17%), Tongan (22%), and Fijian (22%) Californians.

For most ethnicities, bachelor's degree attainment rates have risen modestly over the past five years, including up four percentage points for Asian and three for NHPI Californians, consistent with statewide trends, although rates for NHPI adults remain substantially below the state average.

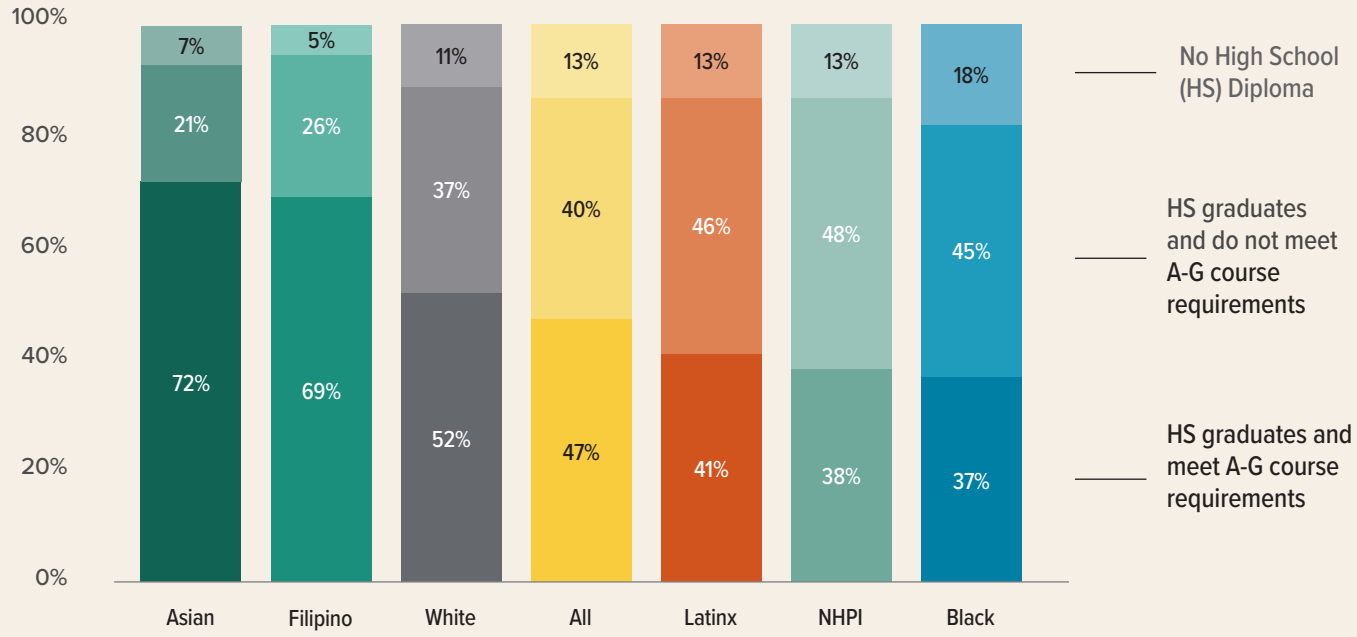
A closer look at educational attainment among AANHPI subgroups also shows substantial variation in high school completion and college attendance among Asian Americans and NHPI Californians. Sixteen percent of Cambodian, 14% of Laotian, and 14% of Vietnamese Californians lack a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 2% or less of Taiwanese, Japanese, and Korean Californians.

One in four NHPI working age adults has attended college without earning a degree, with all NHPI subgroups hovering within a few percentage points of that rate. By contrast, only 13% of Asian Californians have attended college without earning a degree. Consistent with the high baccalaureate rates in Figure 4, Taiwanese (4%) and Indian (5%) Californians are the least likely to have left college without a degree or credential.

High School Completion

Less than half of NHPI high school graduates are eligible to enroll at a UC/CSU campus.

Figure 4. Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Outcomes, 2024-25.



Source: California Department of Education. (2026). DataQuest Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate. Available from: https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/CohRate.aspx?cds=00&agglevel=state&year=2024-25.

"The process of course selection and taking classes that meet graduation requirements is an overwhelming one. I wish the benefits of certain classes were made clearer, like which courses count for college credit or as an A-G requirement."

Krisha Mehta
Oxford Academy

Ninety-three percent of Asian American high school seniors graduated in 2025, the highest rate in the state. NHPI students graduated at an 86% rate, up four percentage points over the past four years. However, the NHPI rate remains slightly below the statewide average, which has increased at a similar pace. The CDE does not publicly publish disaggregated student data beyond the categories of Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander, limiting deeper analysis across additional subgroups.

Furthermore, graduating from high school does not guarantee eligibility for admission to the UC or CSU systems. To qualify for direct enrollment there, students must complete a series of 15 college preparatory courses,[14] called A-G requirements. Seventy-two percent of all Asian American and 38% of NHPI seniors in the 2024-25 cohort completed them. While Asian American students had the highest A-G completion rates in the state, NHPI students were ranked lowest, just below both Black and American Indian and Alaska Native students.

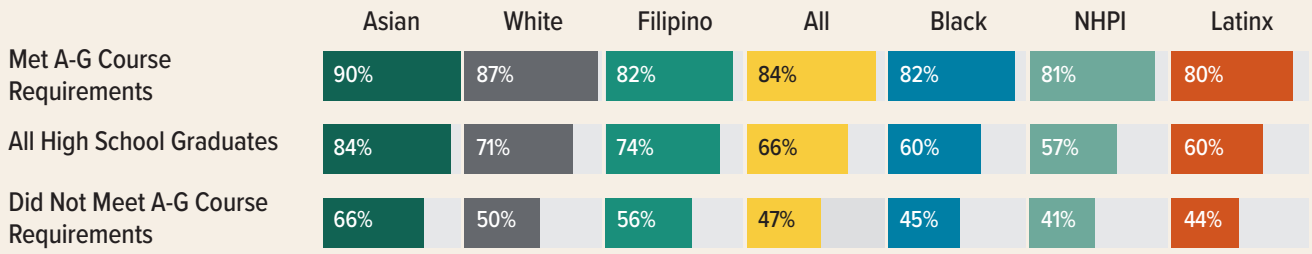
When considering only the share of high school graduates who completed A-G requirements, 79% of Asian American graduates in the 2024-25 cohort did so, up two percentage points from 2021, while the rate for NHPI graduates was 44% — unchanged from 2021, leaving the majority of NHPI students ineligible for entry to the UC and CSU systems.

College-Going Rates for High School Graduates

College-going outcomes further demonstrate that disparities extend beyond academic preparation. Meeting A-G requirements increases college enrollment across all racial and ethnic groups; however, NHPI students enroll in college at slightly lower rates than their peers, even when they meet eligibility standards.

Meeting A-G requirements is associated with higher college enrollment, but NHPI students enroll at lower rates across all preparation levels.

Figure 5. College-Going Rates Within 12 Months of High School Completion by A-G Course Completion Status and Race/Ethnicity, 2022-23 Cohort.



Source: California Department of Education. (2026). DataQuest College-Going Rate. Available from: https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DQCensus/CGRLoc.aspx?agglevel=State&cds=00&year=2022-23.

"My journey to higher education has been filled with trial and error ... I still remember how daunting college and financial aid applications were."

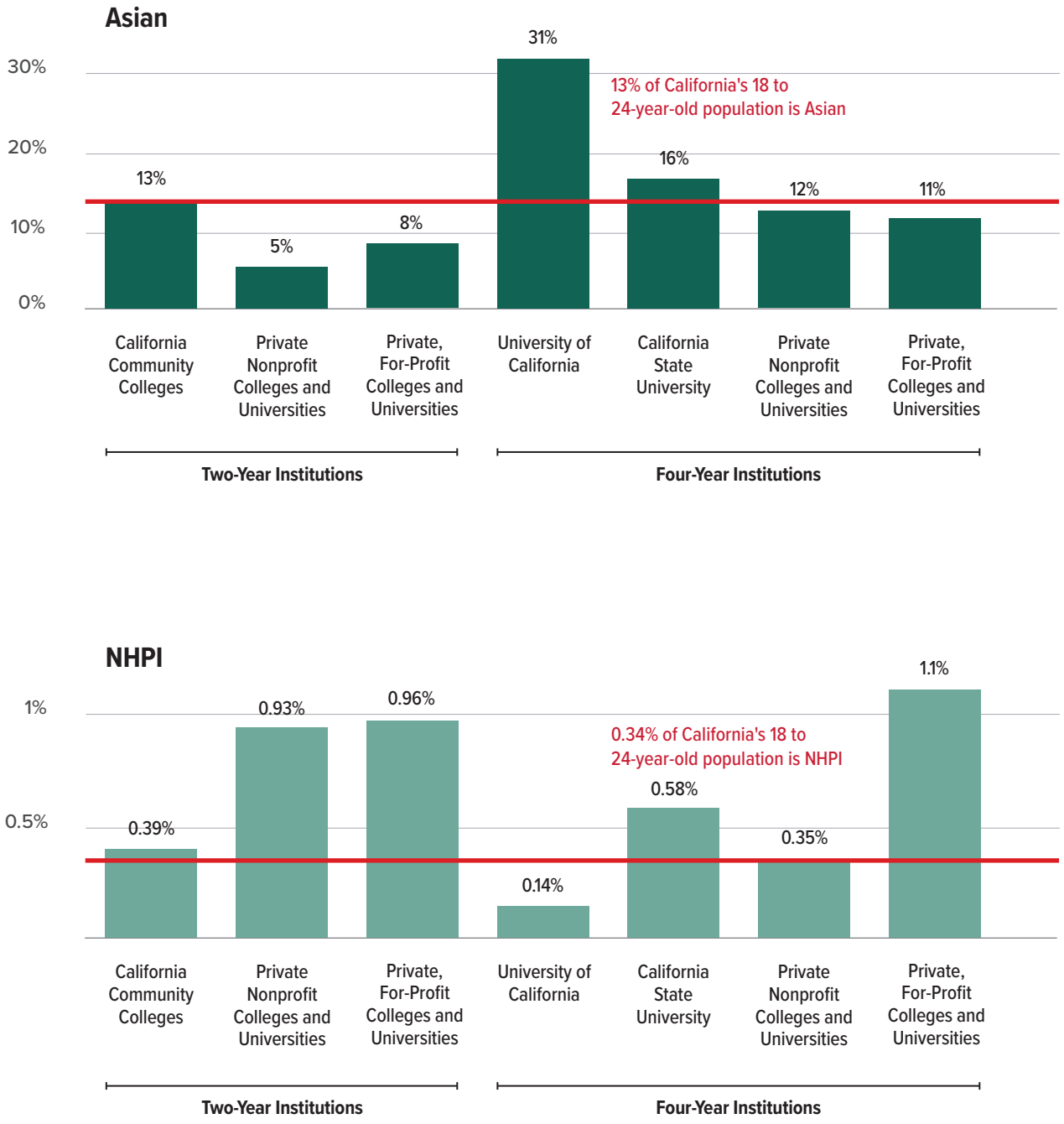
Tiffany Phan
San José State University

COLLEGE ACCESS

California maintains the nation's largest public higher education system, consisting of three public segments and over 200 private for-profit and independent nonprofit institutions, which together enroll over 3 million undergraduate students. Asian American students account for 14% of undergraduate enrollees, while NHPI students account for just under half a percent, consistent with when the Campaign last examined this data in 2021. Across the state's higher education systems, AANHPI students are largely represented relative to their share of the state's young adult population of 13%. The most notable exception is at the UC, where Asian American students account for 31% of all undergraduates, while NHPI students are underrepresented at just 0.1% of undergraduates, and only 3% of NHPI first time freshmen enrollment across the state enroll at the UC.

Asian American students are overrepresented at the UC, while NHPI students are underrepresented at the UC.

Figure 6. Share of Asian American and NHPI Enrollment by Sector, 2023-24.

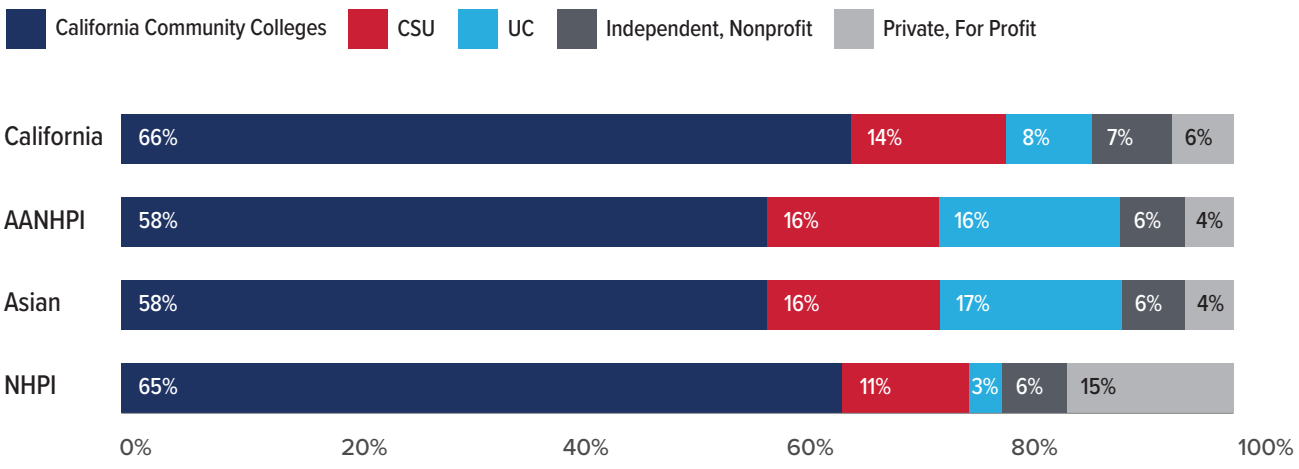


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023-2024, 12-Month Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity. US Census Bureau, 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Samples.

Over half of Asian American and about two-thirds of NHPI undergraduates were enrolled in a CCC campus in 2023-24. One-third of all Asian American students were enrolled in a public four-year institution compared to just 14% of NHPI undergraduates. **An Asian American student is more than five times as likely to enroll in a UC as an NHPI student, and an NHPI student is nearly four times as likely to enroll in a for-profit college as an Asian American student.** When viewed collectively , this distribution of AANHPI students is virtually identical to that of Asian American students alone, due to the considerable difference in population size, further underscoring the necessity of collecting and publicizing disaggregated data to ensure NHPI student experiences can be properly understood.

The majority of Asian American and NHPI students are enrolled a California Community College.

Figure 7. California Undergraduate Enrollments by Segment, All Students, Asian American and NHPI Students, 2023-2024.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023-2024, 12-Month Undergraduate Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity.

Table 2: California's 18-24 year old and public sector undergraduate Asian American and NHPI populations as a share of their total AANHPI enrollment.

Ethnic Group	Percentage of CA Asian Americans and NHPI Population 18-24	California Community Colleges	California State University	University of California
Chinese (except Taiwanese)	26.8%	24.4%	15.3%	31.3%
Filipino	22.9%	25.7%	26.8%	14.3%
Vietnamese	13.3%	15.5%	21.5%	15.1%
Indian	12.4%	11.2%	9.7%	18%
Korean	6.5%	7.7%	5.1%	10.3%
Hmong	2.5%	*	3.8%	0.6%
Japanese	2.4%	7.6%	2.6%	5.9%
Cambodian	2%	2.2%	2.4%	1.3%
Samoan	0.9%	3.0%	0.3%	0.3%
Indonesian	0.8%	*	0.6%	1.1%
Laotian	0.7%	2.5%	0.9%	0.6%
Native Hawaiian	0.5%	3.2%	0.2%	0.9%
Fijian	0.5%	*	0.6%	0.4%
Burmese	0.4%	*	0.5%	
Tongan	0.4%	*	0.2%	0.1%
Bangladeshi	0.2%	*	0.7%	0.8%
Malaysian	0.1%		0.2%	0.6%
Nepalese	0.2%		0.4%	
Marshallese	0.1%			
Mongolian	0.1%			
Indo Chinese			0.2%	
Other Asian	1.7%	28.1%	2.4%	
Pakistani	1.4%	*	1.8%	2%
Sri Lankan	0.2%	*	0.3%	0.4%
Taiwanese	1.7%	*	2.2%	5.8%
Thai	0.5%	*	0.7%	0.4%
Guamanian/Chamorro	0.4%	2.1%	0.2%	0.4%
Other Pacific Islander	0.4%	4.9%	0.3%	0.8%

Note: Counts at the CCC are unduplicated at the student level within each demographic group. However, because students may identify with more than one demographic group, the sum of group counts may exceed the overall student count, leading to the sum of the percentages to exceed 100%.
Note: CCC and UC counts include all undergraduates, while CSU includes all incoming freshmen and transfer students.
*Note: Sections for the CCC with a * symbol represent categories that the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office is now capturing for recent cohorts, but for which 2023-24 data was incomplete. Along with those listed above, data is now being collected for Afghan students.*
Note: Race/ethnicity data utilized by the UC, CSU, and CCC utilize distinct race/ethnicity data definitions and as such are not directly comparable.
Note: Data for "Other Asian Students" for the UC is unavailable for 2023-24 enrollment due to a reporting error.
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (2026). 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Samples, CCC Chancellor's Office (2026). Custom Data File, The California State University (2026). CSU Systemwide New Undergraduate Enrollment by Detailed Asian American/ Pacific Islander Race- Fall 2015-Fall 2023- First Time Freshmen, University of California (2026). UC Student Disaggregated Race and Ethnicity Data, CA Resident and Non-Resident Domestic (2023-24).

California Community Colleges

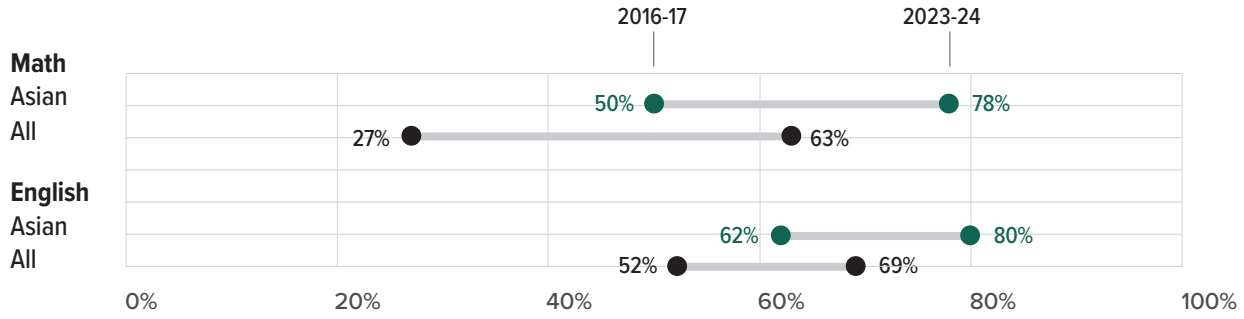
The CCC system is the largest higher education system in the country and serves the majority of AANHPI undergraduates in the state. In 2023-24, the system enrolled over 2.1 million students, including 302,989 Asian American and 27,308 NHPI students. Filipino students represented the largest share of AANHPI students (26%), followed by Chinese (24%) and Vietnamese (16%) students. Among individual NHPI groups, Native Hawaiians (3.2%) represented the largest share, followed by Samoan (3%) students.

Placement and Remedial Education Reform (AB 705)

The rate at which community college students complete transfer-level English and math coursework has skyrocketed due to a series of reforms that deemphasized the role[15] of remedial education for incoming students. Despite Asian students already having a starting point that exceeded the state average, completion rates for English and math have increased substantially since the reforms' implementation. Asian students are now 28 percentage points more likely to complete a transfer-level math course within a year of initial enrollment, and 18 percentage points more likely to do so for English coursework, than they were in 2017. Unfortunately, the CCC does not disaggregate by subgroup nor include data on NHPI students. While it's likely that rates for NHPI students have increased roughly in accordance with other groups, the lack of available data makes it impossible to determine whether equity gaps remain data does not disaggregate by subgroup nor include data on NHPI students.[16]

Transfer-level math and English completion rates for Asian students have skyrocketed in recent years.

Figure 8. California Community Colleges — Percentage of First-Time Students Completing Transfer-Level Courses Within One Year, Fall 2016-Fall 2023.



Noye: Data not available for NHPI students.

Source: California Community Colleges (2026). Transfer-Level English, English as a Second Language and Math Completion Dashboard. Available from: https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/transfer-level-dashboard.

California State University

In fall 2024, 408,248 undergraduates enrolled[17] in the CSU system, including 64,341 Asian American students and 1,187 NHPI students. Filipino students made up 27% of CSU's AANHPI population, the highest share of any ethnicity. They, along with Vietnamese students, were overrepresented at the CSU compared to their share of the state population, while Chinese students (15%) enroll in the CSU at lower rates.

Indian freshman enrollment has increased by 33% since 2020, the largest increase among any group with a population above 50 students.[18] Fifteen distinct Asian American ethnic groups accounted for at least 50 first-time freshmen along with a single NHPI group (Fijian), that alone accounted for 32% of NHPI freshmen.

In the 2023-24 school year, 14% of Asian American first-time freshmen and 9% of NHPI first-time freshmen enrolled in a CSU. That same year, 25% of the state's NHPI transfer students and 32% of Asian American transfer students enrolled in a CSU. While CSU was the most common destination for Asian American transfer students, the share of NHPI transfer students who enrolled there was lower than for any group other than Black students.

"My higher education journey began at a community college, where I learned that talent alone is not enough — students also need access to guidance, mentorship, and culturally affirming spaces to navigate complex systems."

Neelam Bandhu
Graduate, CSU Sacramento

CSU-CCC Collaboration: PolyTransfer Advantage Academy

Launched in 2022 through a partnership between Cal Poly Pomona and Mt. San Antonio College (SAC), the PolyTransfer Advantage Academy[19] supports primarily underrepresented and first-generation prospective transfer students by building belonging and guiding them through the transfer process. This free two-day program includes campus tours, residential experiences, access to resources like advising and financial aid, and faculty mentorship, and has expanded beyond Mt. SAC, serving over 160 students in 2024 and 128 in 2025.

University of California

In fall 2024, the UC enrolled 236,070 undergraduates,[20] including 85,761 Asian American and 530 NHPI students. This included 18,585 Asian American students and 109 NHPI students enrolling as first-time freshmen.[21] Chinese students made up 31% of the AANHPI population at the UC, making them the largest Asian American subgroup at the system. That fall, Filipino students were underrepresented at the UC, accounting for just 14% of AANHPI students, significantly below their share of California's population.[22]

Three percent of NHPI first-time freshmen and 21% of Asian American first-time freshmen enrolled in the UC in the 2023-24 academic year. That same year, 19% of Asian American transfer students enrolled in a UC, while just under 2% of NHPI transfer students did so.

"Balancing academics, leadership, and personal responsibilities was not easy, but the community and support I found reminded me of why I started. My journey has shaped my purpose to use my education to uplift my community and ensure that students like me feel seen, supported, and empowered."

Adi Sereima Tinaiamote Tuidelaibatiki
San José State University

UC Davis Lotus Mana Center

The Lotus Mana Center, part of UC Davis's Strategic Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Retention Initiative,[23] launched in November 2025, focuses on promoting equitable outcomes for California's Filipino, Southeast Asian, and NHPI students by providing a centralized hub of culturally responsive programs and resources that support academic achievement, leadership development, and belonging. These include alumni networking events, study groups and academic advising, Talanoa gatherings rooted in Pasifika storytelling and reflection, and collaborative study halls.[24] In its first quarter, the center served 1,600 students and nearly 4,000 students the following quarter. In collaboration with the Asian American Studies Department and the School of Education, the center offers credit-bearing courses and first-year programming that help students explore AAPI culture, connect with faculty and staff members, and receive guidance navigating campus resources.[25]

Private Colleges

The significant overrepresentation of NHPI students among private college undergraduates is largely driven by high rates of enrollment in for-profit colleges. Fifteen percent of NHPI undergraduates are enrolled in a for-profit college, substantially more than the share of Asian American students (4%), and a higher rate than all groups other than Black students.

These disproportionate enrollment rates are particularly notable when it comes to transfer students. In 2023-24, eight percent of Asian American transfer students enrolled in a nonprofit institution, and 13% enrolled in a for-profit institution. Meanwhile, 15% of NHPI transfer students enrolled in a nonprofit institution, and 31% enrolled in a for-profit institution.

COLLEGE SUCCESS

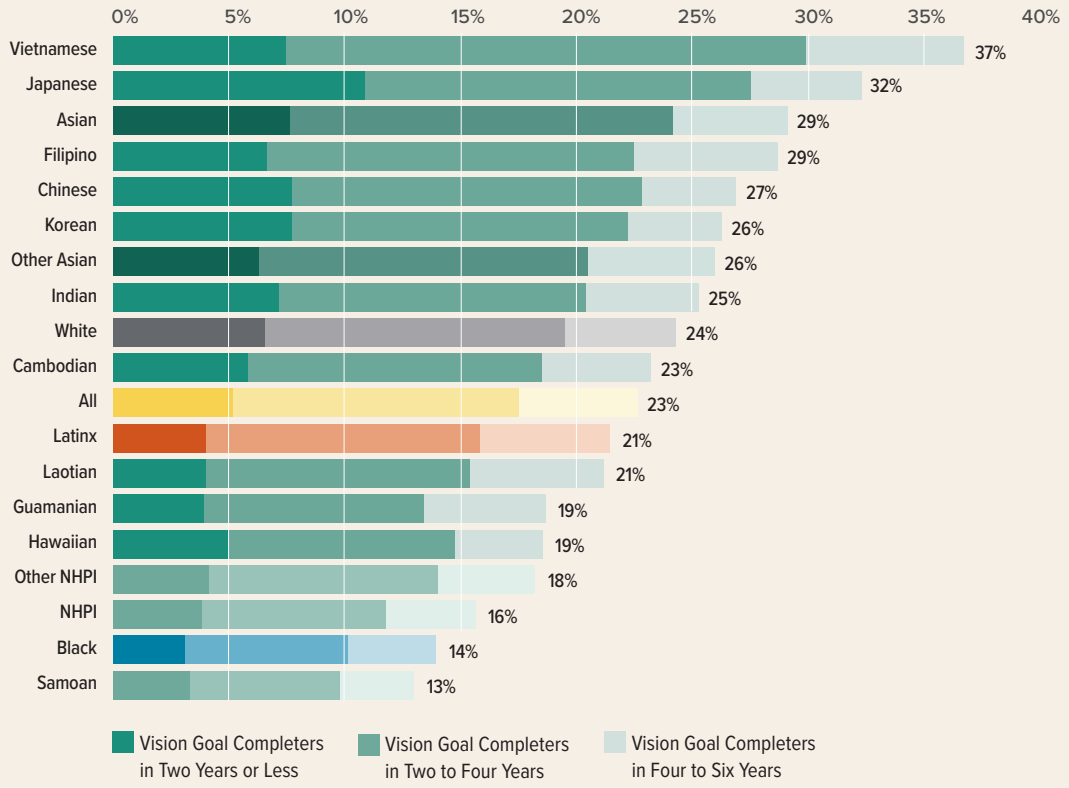
California Community Colleges

Over half of the state's Asian American students and two-thirds of its NHPI students are enrolled in a California community college, making increasing the rate of community college graduation arguably the most critical single component of the effort to meet Governor Gavin Newsom's 70% statewide attainment goal.[26] In fall 2023, nearly 90,000 (48%) AANHPI students indicated that they were seeking to either earn a degree, transfer to a four-year university, or both.[27] However, just 40% of Asian American and 23% of NHPI students from the 2016-17 cohort accomplished either within six years of initial enrollment, and of the 13 groups listed in the figures below, just one group (Vietnamese, 49%) met or exceeded the rate of students who indicated doing so as their goal.

Figure 9 shows two-, four-, and six-year CCC graduation rates for Asian American and NHPI subgroups. Overall, only 8% of Asian American and 4% of NHPI students who enrolled in 2017-18 were supported to earn an associate degree or certificate within two years, while 29% and 16% did so within six years, respectively.

Less than one-third of Asian American and one-fifth of NHPI community college students earn a degree or credential in six years.

Figure 9. Six-Year Vision Goal Completion, 2017-18 Entering Cohort.

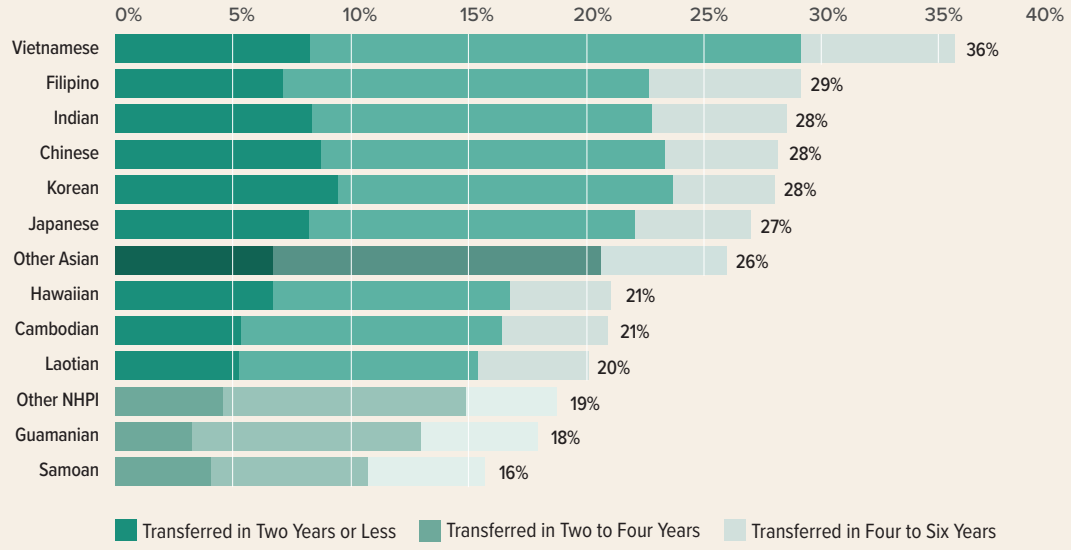


Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2026). Custom Data File.

The rate at which Asian American and NHPI students complete a degree or earn a credential at a CCC varies substantially by ethnicity. Vietnamese students had the highest degree completion rates, followed by Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese students, while Laotian and Cambodian students had the lowest. Among NHPI students the range was narrower, with Guamanian and Hawaiian students having relatively higher rates of completion, while just 13% of Samoan students completed a degree or certificate within six years. Even so, **not one NHPI subgroup had a higher six-year completion rate than any individual Asian American subgroup.**

Vietnamese students were the most likely to transfer to a four-year institution within six years, while Guamanian and Samoan students were the least likely.

Figure 10. Six-Year Transfer Rates, 2017-18 Entering Cohort.



Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2026). Custom Data File.

"As a community college student juggling three campuses and trying to figure out which classes would actually transfer, education didn't just open doors; it freed my thinking and challenged me to do more than just accept 'that's just how the system works' as the answer."

Jenn Galinato
Sacramento State University

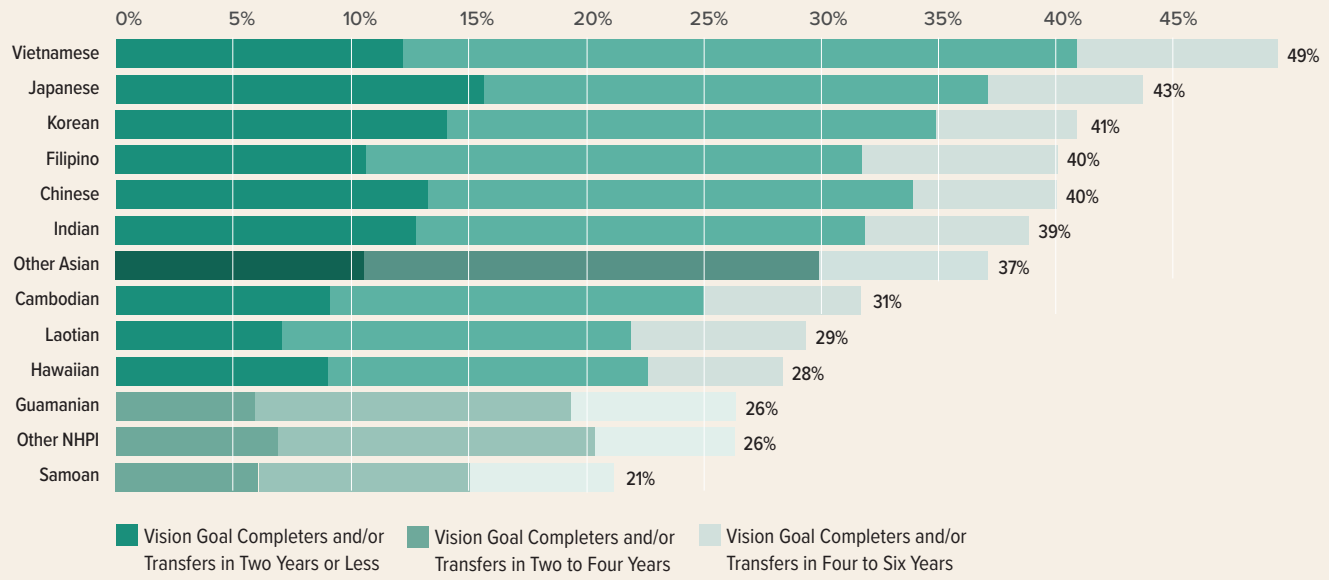
Transfer rates also show substantial differences by ethnicity. In 2017-18, 36% of Vietnamese students had transferred after six years, the highest rate of any Asian American subgroup, while Hawaiian students had the highest rates among NHPI students at 21%. With the notable exception of Cambodian and Laotian students, **students from Asian American subgroups had higher transfer rates after four years than NHPI students did after six.**

"I had to overcome imposter syndrome. Coming from community college, I sometimes questioned if I belonged on campus."

Kristina Nguyen
Graduate, UC Berkeley

The share of AANHPI community college students who earned a degree or transferred within six years varies substantially by ethnicity.

Figure 11. Percentage of Students Who Attained the Vision Goal Completion Definition or Transferred to a Four-Year Institution, 2017-18 Entering Cohort.



Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2026). Custom Data File.

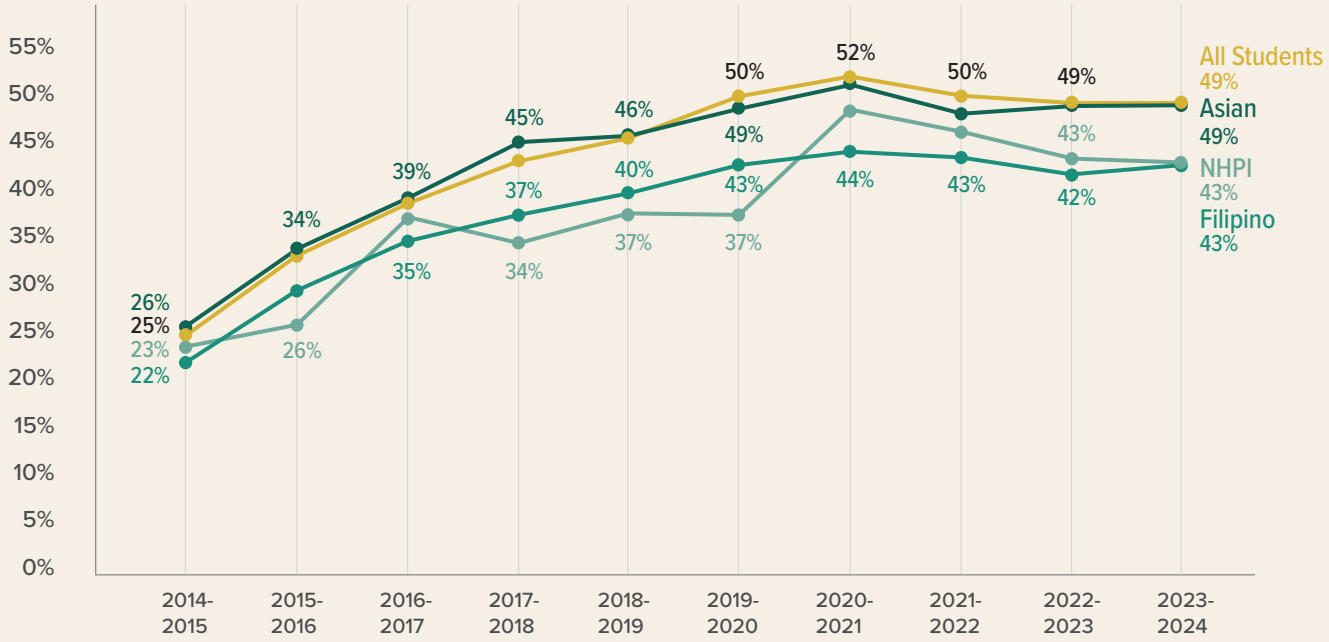
When factoring in the rates of students who earned a credential and/or transferred, we again found that even the lowest six-year rates for an Asian American subgroup (Laotian, 29%) exceeded those of the highest rates for an NHPI subgroup (28%). Vietnamese students were over twice as likely to have either completed a degree/credential or transferred within four years of initial enrollment than Samoan students were within six years.

Associate Degree for Transfer Rates

An associate degree for transfer (ADT) provides community college students with a streamlined pathway to the CSU system, guaranteeing admission to a CSU campus with junior standing in a similar major. The ADT also serves as a mechanism for students to save time and money by aligning coursework between community colleges and universities, improving the likelihood of timely degree completion.

ADT rates for AANHPI students have dropped slightly since peaking during the pandemic.

Figure 12. California Community Colleges ADTs as a Share of Associate Degrees.



Source: Data Vista California Community Colleges (2026). Single Metric View: General Admit Cohort, Earned an Award: Associate Degree for Transfer (608) and Associate Degree (631). Retrieved from: https://datavista.cccco.edu/

The share of associate degrees earned by NHPI and Filipino students that are ADTs remained consistently below the systemwide average at 43%, while about half (49%) of all associate degrees earned by Asian American students were ADTs. ADT rates have largely plateaued in the past few years for all groups.

"The transfer process has been harder than I expected. The requirements and classes can be confusing, and it's not always clear what counts toward your major. There's always a fear of taking the wrong classes, which could delay transfer and extend enrollment longer than planned."

Meghna Penugonda
De Anza College

AANHPI Student Achievement Program

Housed within the Foundation for California Community Colleges, the Student Achievement Program (SAP) currently serves 51 community colleges.[28] It uses program funds to establish and strengthen AAPI curriculum, foster student leadership through internships and mentorship opportunities, and promote career readiness.[29] SAP funds have supported initiatives like Movement API at Los Positas College, which provide culturally responsive learning communities, counseling and transfer support, leadership opportunities, and events such as cultural programming and college tours to support students in building a strong sense of belonging.[30]

California State University

Asian American students graduate at a higher rate than their peers, with 41% of Asian American full-time freshmen graduating after four years and 73% doing so after six. NHPI freshmen are less well supported, with less than one-third (29%) completing college after four years, and just over half (56%) doing so after six—both rates below the state average. Four-year graduation rates for Asian American freshmen have increased by 13 percentage points in the last six years and had been rising at a similar rate for NHPI freshmen before slightly regressing for the most recent cohorts.

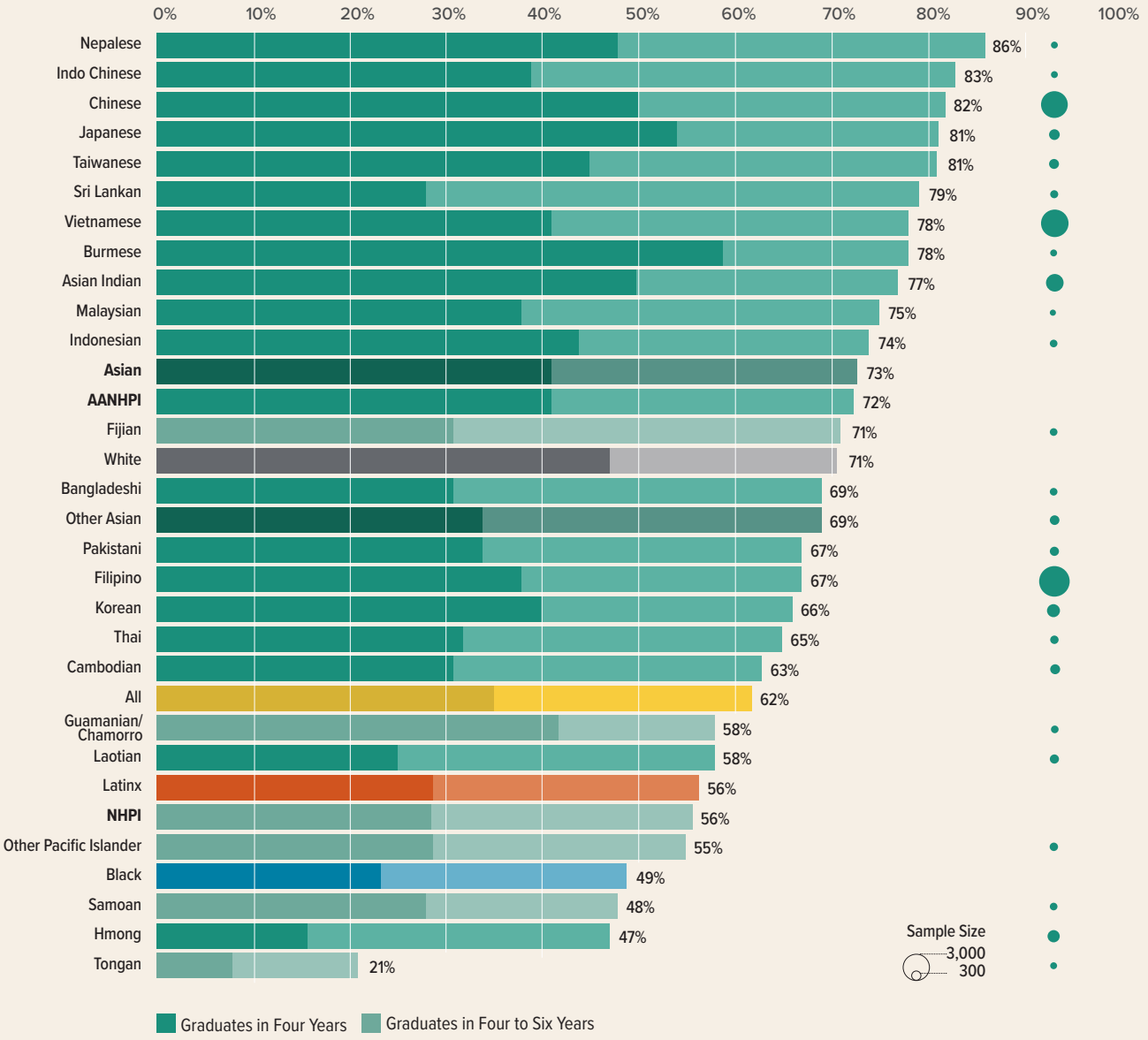
These total rates hide the wide variation in both four and six-year graduation rates within the Asian American and NHPI student populations. While more than 80% of Nepalese, Chinese, and Japanese students graduate in six years, just six in 10 Filipino, Cambodian and Thai students, and fewer than half of Samoan, Hmong, and Tongan students do so. Once again, we find that graduation rates for NHPI students are much more in line with their Black and Latinx peers than their Asian American ones.

Asian American transfer students (80%) were 10 percentage points more likely to graduate within four years than their NHPI peers (70%). Mirroring systemwide trends, both four-year and two-year rates for Asian American transfer students have plateaued for the most recent cohorts after over a decade of steady growth. Rates for NHPI students similarly have not grown since we last examined this data, although their smaller population size has resulted in larger year-to-year shifts than other groups.

All but four of the 22 Asian American subgroups for which the CSU collects data had higher four-year graduation rates for transfer students than the statewide average of 76%. Conversely, just one NHPI subgroup (Fijian) could say the same.

Average graduation rates for Asian American students at the CSU are high, but that is not representative of many AANHPI groups.

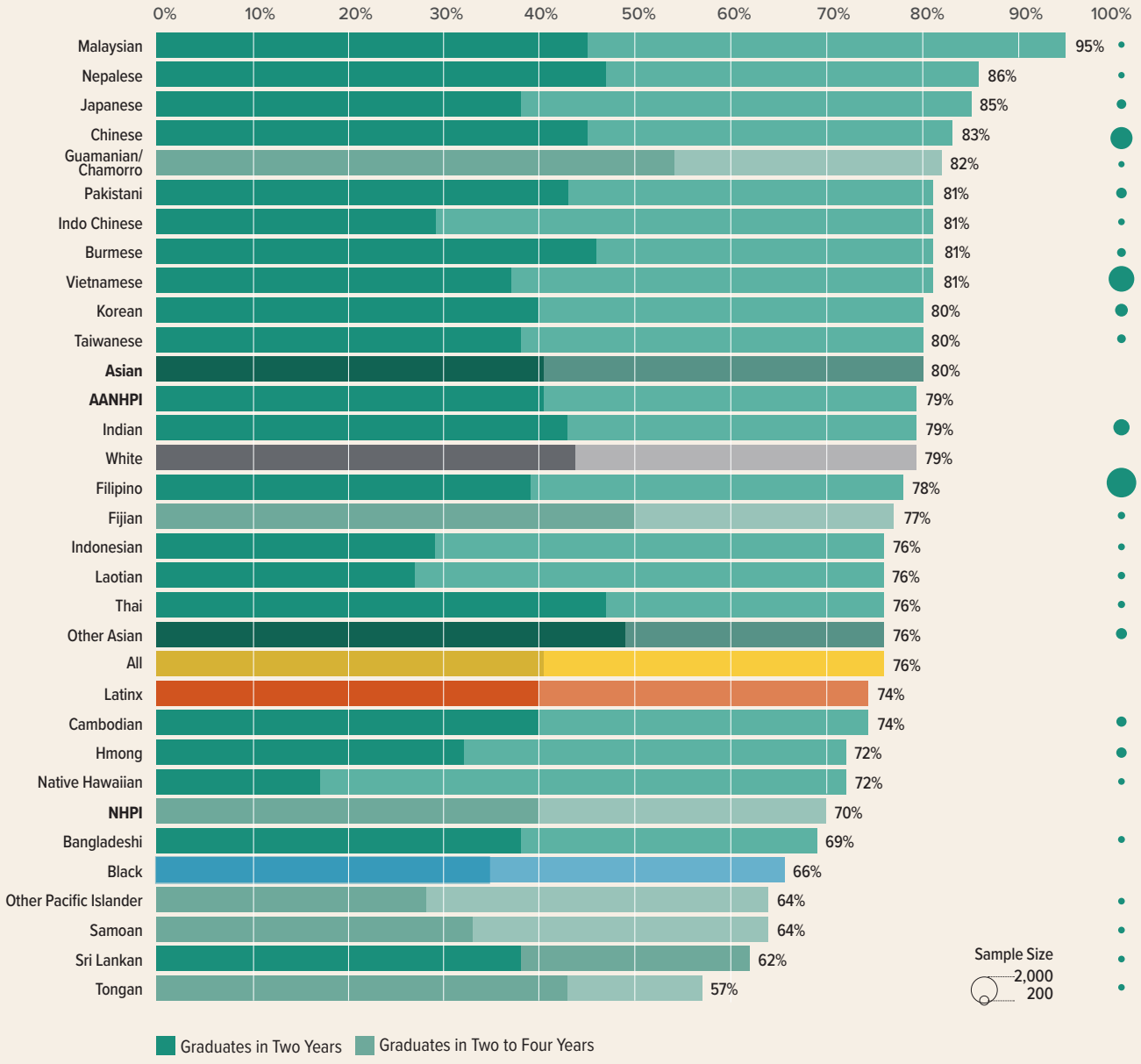
Figure 13. CSU Four-Year and Six-Year Graduation Rates for First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen, Fall 2018 Cohort.



Source: The California State University, CSU Systemwide First-Time Freshmen Graduation Rates by Detailed Asian American/Pacific Islander Race - Fall 2014-2023 Cohorts. https://www.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses/Documents/FTF_Grad_Persist_AAPI.pdf California State University (2026). CSU Student Success Dashboard, Graduation and Continuation Rates, First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen.

Most Asian American and NHPI transfer students at the CSU graduate within four years.

Figure 14. CSU Two-Year and Four-Year Graduation Rates for Transfer, Fall 2020 Cohort.



Source: The California State University. CSU Systemwide California Community College Graduation Rates by Detailed Asian American/Pacific Islander Race. https://www.calstate.edu/data-center/institutional-research-analyses/Documents/CCC_Grad_Persist_AAPI.pdf California State University (2026). CSU Student Success Dashboard, Graduation and Continuation Rates, CCC Transfers.

"Lack of guidance led to unnecessary classes that did not apply to transfer requirements, wasted time, increased stress, and additional financial burdens … Success often came down to luck in finding a college guidance counselor or mentor."

Jay Kim
Graduate, Santa Clara University

University of California

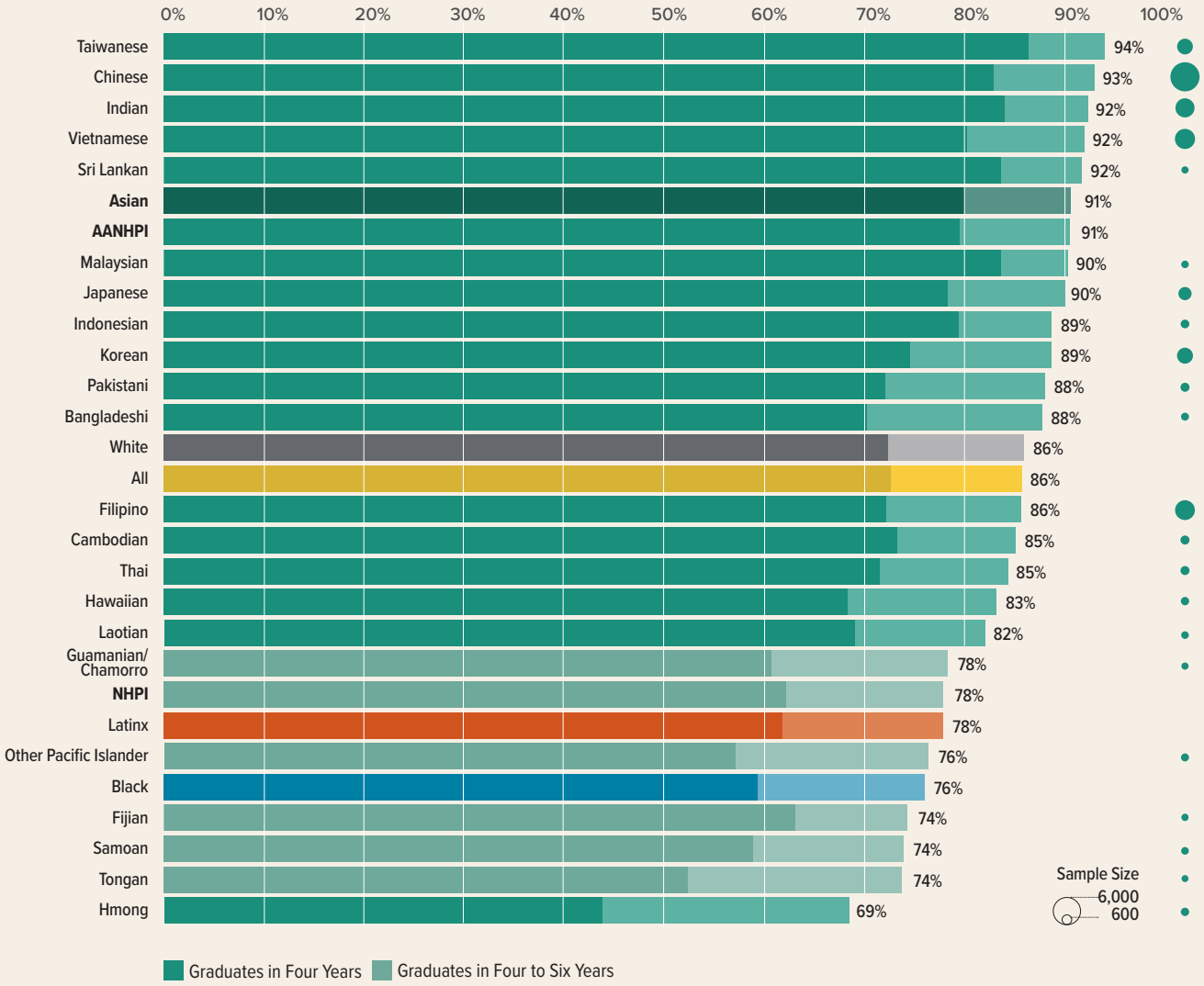
Since 2015, the UC four-year and six-year graduation rates have increased slightly across the board, despite already having the highest graduation rates of any public higher education system in the state. Nearly three-quarters of freshmen (73%) graduated from the UC within four years, with 86% graduating after six. Asian American freshmen have slightly higher graduation rates (80% and 91%, respectively). However, NHPI students do not receive the support needed to succeed at rates similar to their Asian American peers, as roughly the same share of Asian American freshmen graduate within four years as NHPI freshmen do within six. While Asian American students overall perform very well, graduation rates for students from several Southeast Asian American groups remain below the systemwide average.

"Sometimes it feels like once you're placed into a category, it's assumed your needs are already met, but smaller or less represented communities don't always have the same access to resources."

Sara Arman
San José City College

UC graduation rates are high, but equity gaps for NHPI students persist.

Figure 15. UC Four-Year and Six-Year Graduation Rates for First-Time Freshmen, Fall 2018 Cohort.

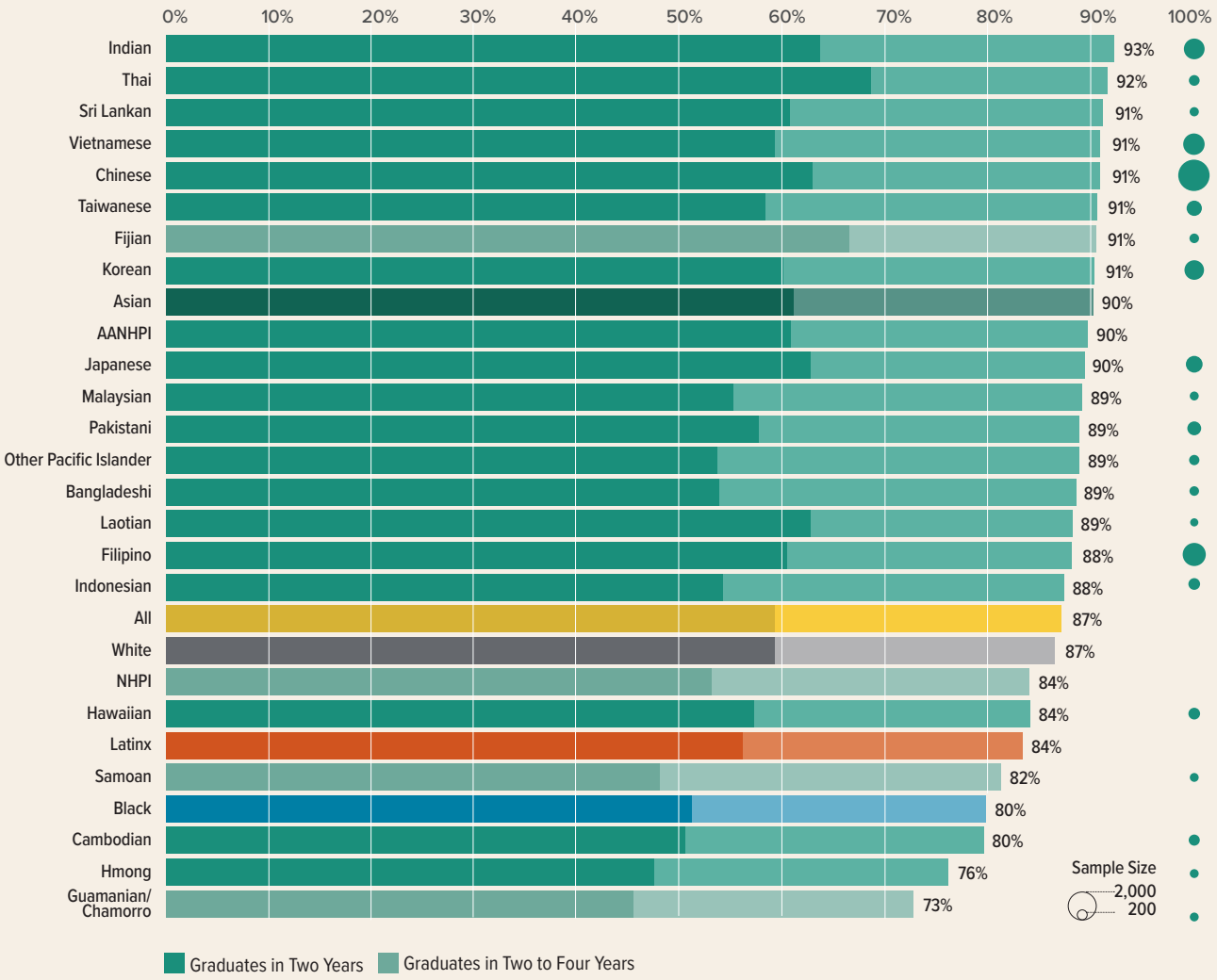


Source: University of California (2026). UC Student Disaggregated Race and Ethnicity Data. https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/disaggregated-data.

Transfer students' graduation rates at the UC are similarly high, with 90% of Asian American students graduating within four years, along with 84% of NHPI students.

A majority of AANHPI transfer students at the UC earn a degree within two years, and nearly all do so within four.

Figure 16. Two-Year and Four-Year Graduation Rates for Transfer Students, Fall 2020 Cohort.



Source: University of California (2026). UC Student Disaggregated Race and Ethnicity Data. https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/disaggregated-data.

ADMISSION RATES

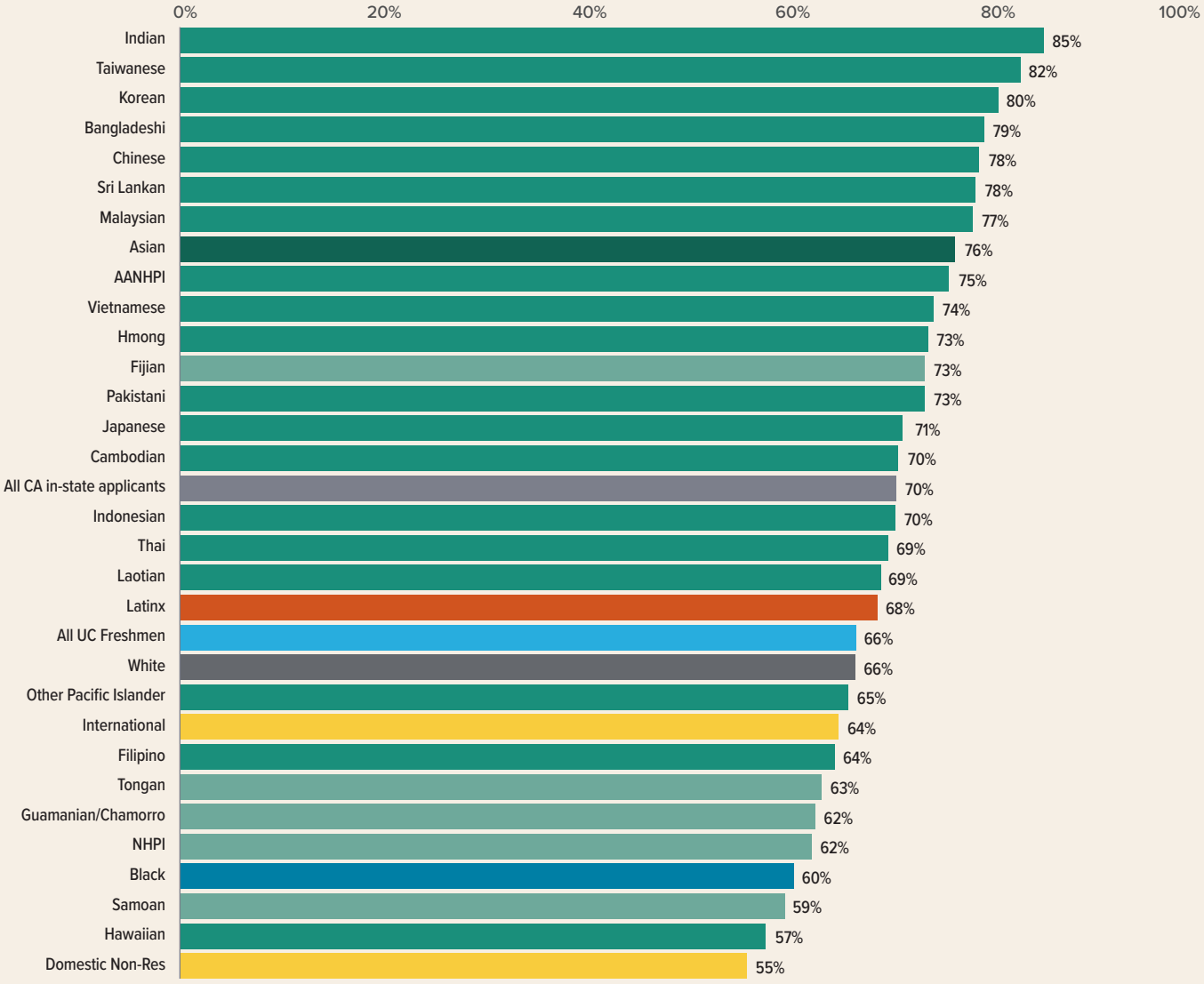
The average acceptance rate for Asian American California residents at the UC for fall 2025 was 76% — the highest among all aggregated racial groups, and well above the 62% rate for prospective NHPI students. Looking at individual subgroups, 85% of Indian students were admitted, and they were 28 percentage points more likely to be accepted to the UC than Native Hawaiian students. As A-G completion rates keep increasing at a faster rate than systemwide enrollment, capacity constraints continue to require that qualified applicants look beyond the system to continue their educational journey.

Admission rates are very high, with at least 89% of students from all groups being accepted to at least one campus. While more granular data is unavailable, even here we find that the average admission rate for Asian American students (96%) still exceeds that of NHPI students (91%).

While nearly all students are admitted to the CSU system, due to capacity constraints, many students are directed away from in-demand campuses and majors toward less competitive alternatives —known as "impaction"[31] — that in some cases are hundreds of miles away. In recent years, a combination of regional enrollment shifts and a funding allocation initiative[32] has led to a wave of de-impaction,[33] making certain programs more accessible. However, five CSU campuses, most of which are in large metro areas, remain fully impacted as they have been for at least 15 years. This means capacity limitations will continue to be a hurdle for prospective students for the foreseeable future.

Asian American applicants to the UC see generally high rates of admission, while NHPI applicants do not have the same levels of access.

Figure 17. Admit Rates for California High School Applicants to the UC.



Source: University of California (2026). UC Student Disaggregated Race and Ethnicity Data. https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/disaggregated-data.

In Their Own Words: Brandon Yang

Student at San Joaquin Delta College

"There have been times where I lost sight of why I came back to college, especially as a first-generation Hmong student, doubt creeping into me on whether I belong or if what I do will matter. But it has been the desire to add onto the list of Hmong Americans with a degree and more importantly the desire to be able to help more students like me obtain degrees that motivates me to continue."

My name is Brandon Yang. I was born and raised in Stockton, California, and I am a Hmong American first-generation college student. Growing up, I had no dreams of college; no one from my family had a degree, and it was rare to see a Hmong person like me in higher education as a student or faculty member.

When I graduated from high school in 2021, I didn't go to college like many of my classmates did. Instead, I worked at fast-food restaurants and warehouses, thinking that maybe it was just my calling in life. But in 2024, I realized that I wasn't fulfilled with my life and that it was time to finally take control of my destiny. So after three years, I finally returned to higher education and enrolled in San Joaquin Delta College.

Going into college, I had no idea what resources I needed or what steps it took to get where I needed to be, but that changed when I joined Empowering Positive Initiatives for Change (EPIC) at San Joaquin Delta College that supports the college success of Asian American and Pacific Islander students, connecting me to resources like parking permits, free book loans, transfer workshops, and counseling, and fostering a positive sense of community that helped me succeed and be ready to transfer to a four-year institution.

As I prepare to transfer, one of the most challenging parts of transitioning from a community college to a four-year institution is the handoff between the two, or the lack thereof. Transfer students can prepare for four-year institutions as much as possible, but the reality is that oftentimes there are no people or programs to "catch" them when they transfer. Many CSUs and UCs, from what I've seen, lack an AANHPI program or really any program for transfer students that provides similar support as EPIC, or have had to cut or downsize their centers for AAPI students due to the recent administration. As a future transfer student, it already feels like I am the "odd one out," and the prospect of possibly not being able to find the community I need is disheartening to think about.

Despite the challenges I face, I believe that as an AANHPI student the most important step to succeed in higher education is to use my voice, because the future is decided by those willing to take action, and it has become my goal to use my experiences to help students in the future on their journeys through higher education.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Poverty

The economic conditions in which children grow up drastically mold their educational trajectories. With college attendance costs on the rise, funding a college degree — already a difficult task— is that much more daunting for children of families living in poverty. For Asian American and NHPI Californians, child poverty paints two different stories.

Nine percent of Asian American children in California live in poverty, well below the statewide average of 15%, although many Asian American ethnic groups have rates far exceeding both averages. NHPI children (18%), are twice as likely to grow up in poverty as their Asian American peers. Child poverty rates vary sevenfold across the various AANHPI subgroups; only about one in 25 Indian children live in poverty, while nearly three in 10 Samoan children do.

The highest rates of child poverty are concentrated in Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. Hmong (26%), Laotian (22%), and Cambodian (20%) children face rates that are two to three times the overall Asian American child poverty rate in California and more closely resemble those of Black, AIAN, and Latinx children. Thai (20%), Mongolian (18%), Pakistani (17%), and Burmese (15%) children also experience poverty rates at or above the state average. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Indian (4%), Taiwanese (4%), Filipino (5%), and Japanese (6%) children face poverty at rates below those of their white (8%) peers.

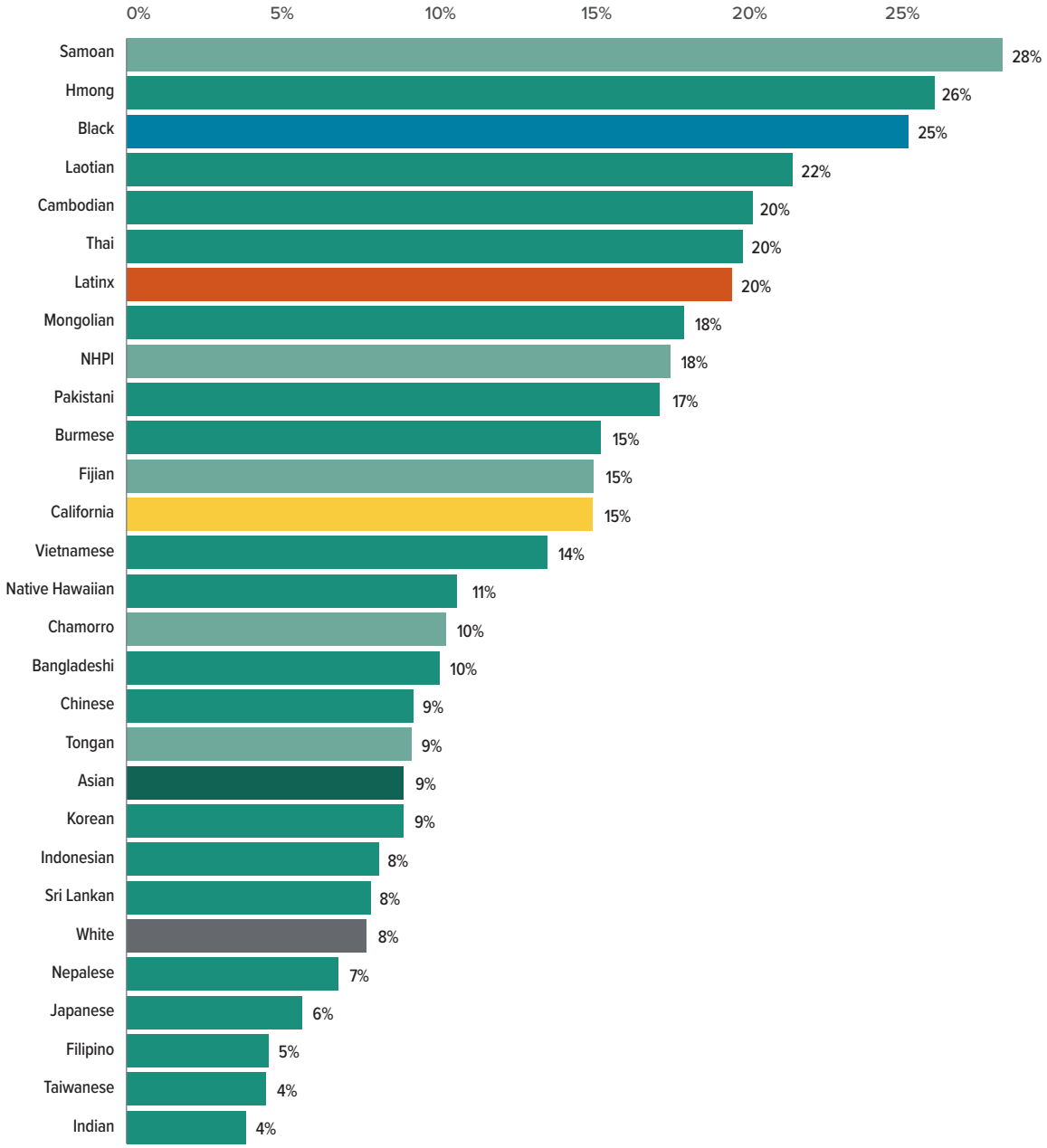
The economic realities that many members of the AANHPI community face follow students into higher education. Communities with elevated child poverty rates tend to produce students with greater financial need and higher reliance on federal and state financial aid to make postsecondary education possible. Ensuring financial aid for tuition and related expenses are available to these students is vital to ensure childhood inequities do not persist in future generations.

"As the child of Vietnamese immigrants, my family relied on food stamps, Section 8 housing, and other programs. My parents worked labor-intensive jobs with little pay, and I saw firsthand how physically demanding work does not always lead to economic stability. From a young age, I understood that education was the pathway to economic mobility."

David Hoang
Graduate, UC San Diego

The children of NHPI Californians face poverty at twice the rate of Asian Californians.

Figure 18. Child Poverty Rates for AANHPI Subgroups.*



**Ethnic groups with a sample size of less than 30 respondents were omitted from this graph. Child poverty estimates are based on the Census Bureau's Official Poverty Measure using ACS 5-Year PUMS data (2018–2023).*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2026). 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-year Public Use Microdata Samples.

In the 2022-23 school year, 9% of Asian American students and 14% of NHPI students at a CCC received food benefits via CalFresh at some point during the year.[34] That same year, 16% of AANHPI UC undergraduates[35] received CalFresh benefits, including nearly a third of Vietnamese students (31%), and one in five of Filipino (21%) and Korean (19%) students.

Pell Grants

Pell Grants are federal financial awards for undergraduate students working toward their first bachelor's degree. As Pell Grant eligibility is based on financial need, it is often used as a proxy for a student's socioeconomic background.

At the UC, NHPI students (37%) are more likely than Asian Americans (29%) to be Pell Grant recipients, but the rates for recipients from both groups are below the systemwide average. However, more than half of Hmong, Samoan, Tongan, and Laotian first-time freshmen enrolling in fall 2025 received Pell Grants.

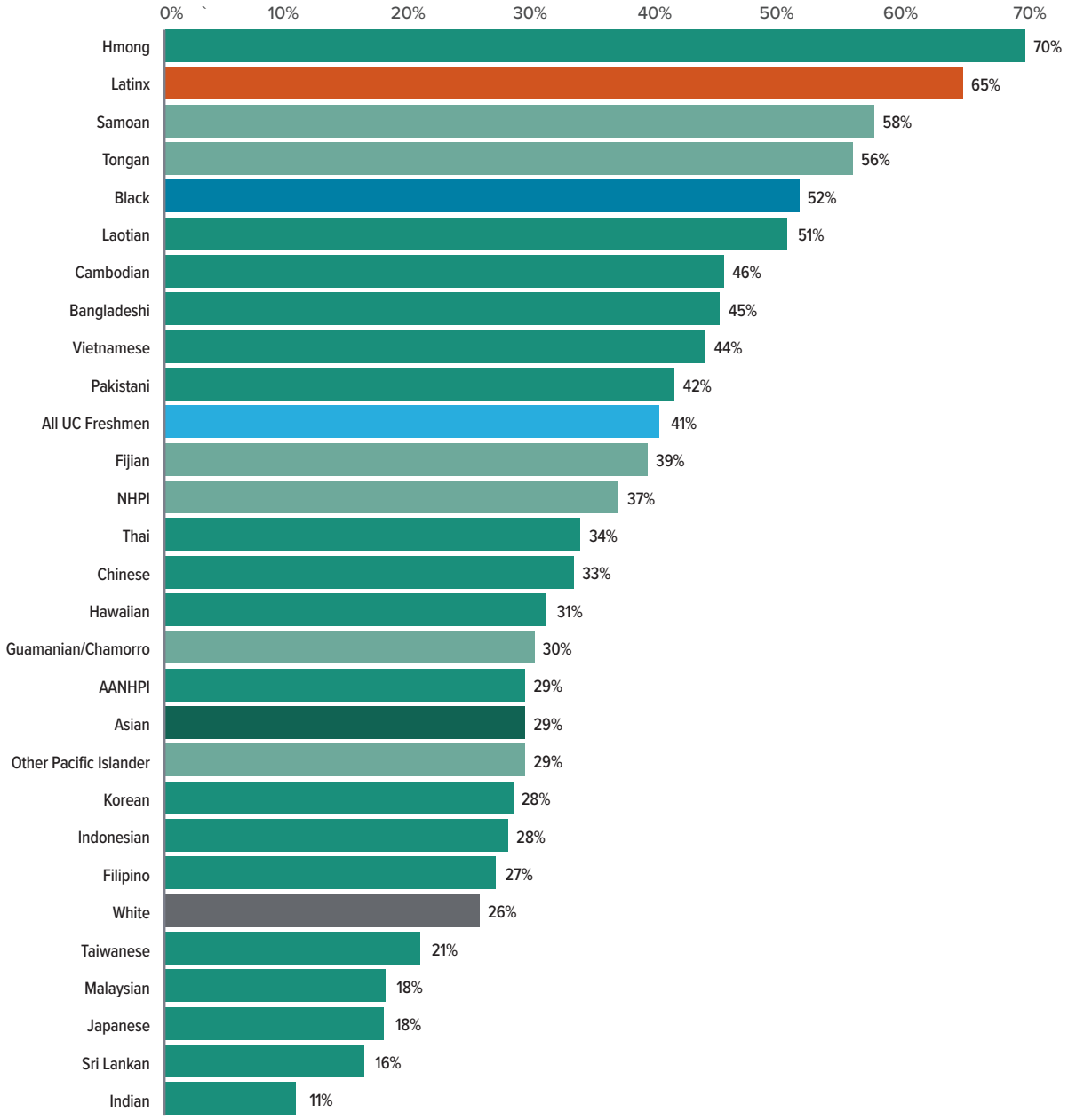
Many college applicants, particularly first-generation students, mistakenly believe that they are not eligible for federal student aid. U.S. nationals, such as Samoans, are eligible for state and federal financial aid, which they can obtain by filling out the FAFSA. Undocumented students and DACA students are not eligible for federal aid, but they can be for state aid (including in-state tuition and Cal Grants), obtained by completing the California DREAM Act Application.[36]

"I experienced homelessness, took on the responsibility of caring for a sick family member, and struggled with my own mental health, all while working part-time just to stay afloat. There were moments when it felt overwhelming, but I refused to give up on myself or my goals."

Makayla Diaz
Foothill College

More than half of Hmong, Samoan, Tongan, and Laotian students enrolling as freshmen at the UC in fall 2025 received Pell Grants.

Figure 19. Pell Grant Receipt Among UC Freshmen from California, 2025.



Source: University of California (2026). UC Student Disaggregated Race and Ethnicity Data. https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/disaggregated-data.

English Language Proficiency

Approximately 73% of Asian Americans and 48% of NHPIs in California speak at least one language other than English at home, accounting for over 90 additional languages.

Nearly one-third of Asian Californians (31%) and 11% of NHPI Californians are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) — meaning they primarily speak a language other than English at home and speak English less than "very well." Only Latinx Californians have a comparable rate (28%). Additionally, rates vary widely across Asian American ethnic groups, with more than 40% of Mongolian, Vietnamese, and Chinese students classified as LEP. There are much lower LEP rates among NHPI Californians, with most groups reporting rates in the single digits.

English learners (EL) make up 17%[37] of students in California TK-12 schools and 14%[38] of Asian American students, 9% of Filipino students, and 12% of NHPI students who graduated from California high schools in 2024-25.

Unfortunately, the EL student population is often underserved in terms of language development and academic needs. Average A-G completion rates[39] for EL students are considerably lower than the overall average. While 79% of all Asian American California high school graduates completed all requirements, just 45% of Asian American EL students did so. Filipino (41%) and NHPI graduates (20%) who are ELs also completed the A-G requirements at rates far below the state average.

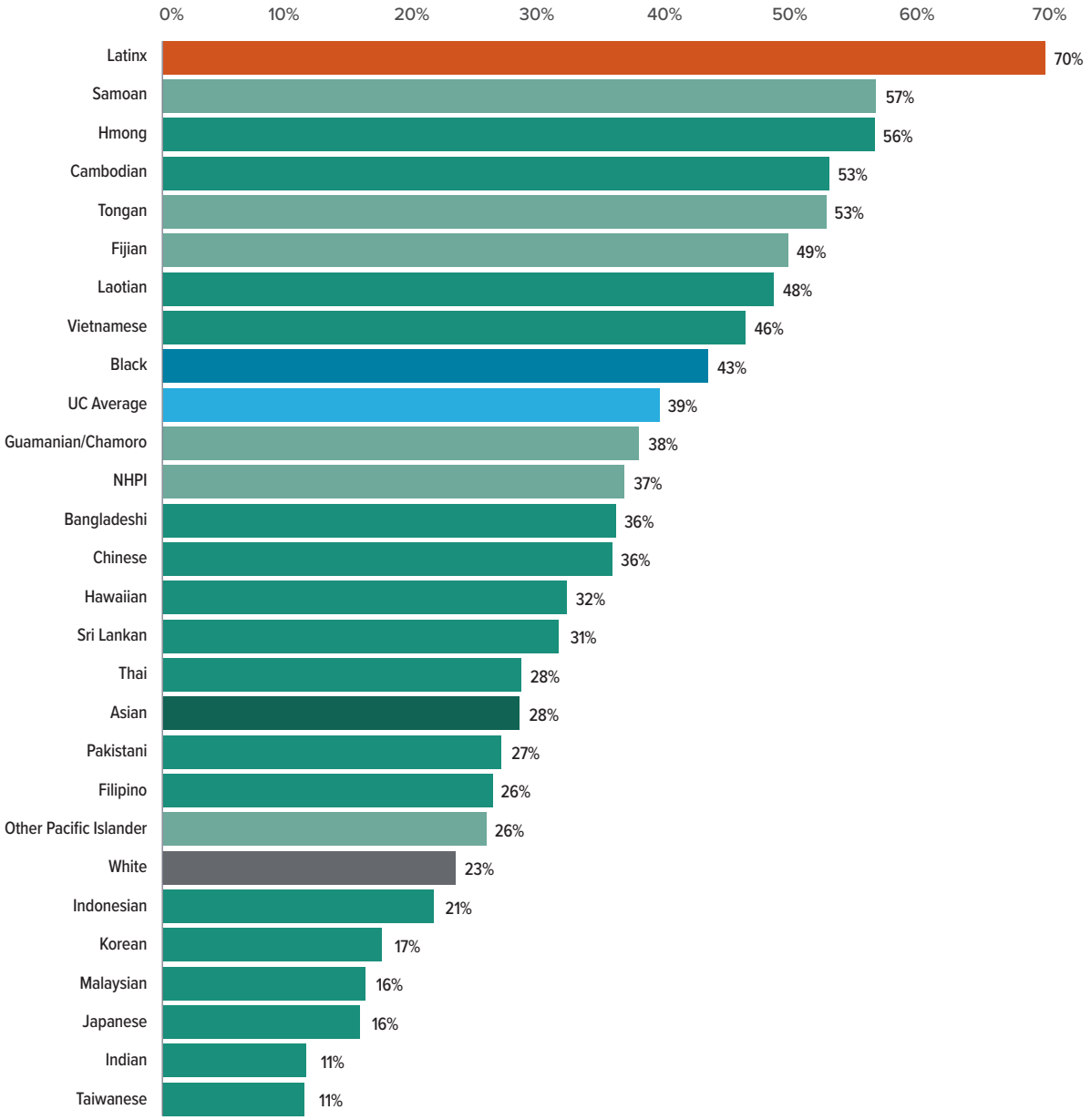
Students identified as ELs are also less likely to enroll in college within 12 months of graduation. Seventy-two percent of Asian American EL graduates in the 2022-2023 class enrolled in college within 12 months, compared to 89% of non-EL students. This pattern holds for Filipino students and NHPI students, with a 27- and 21-point gap between EL and non-EL graduates, respectively.

First-Generation Students

At the UC, 28% of all Asian California-based undergraduates are first-generation, but the rates for students from Southeast Asian backgrounds are about double. Over one-third (37%) of UC California resident NHPI students are first-generation, a share comparable to the system's average, but there remains substantial variation between groups.

Samoan and Hmong UC students are five times more likely to be first generation than their Indian and Taiwanese classmates.

Figure 20. UC First-Generation CA Resident Students, Fall 2025.



Source: University of California (2026). UC Student Disaggregated Race and Ethnicity Data. https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/disaggregated-data.

Undocumented Students

There are over 2.3 million undocumented people living in California accounting for nearly one-fifth of the nationwide total.[40] Asian Americans remain the fastest-growing undocumented racial group in the country, and over one-quarter of the nation's undocumented Asian American residents call California home. Asian Americans currently comprise 21% of the state's undocumented population, accounting for 482,800 individuals.[41] Statewide, India and China remain the top two countries of origin,[42] with 30% of undocumented Asian Americans coming from India, while 29% come from China. Other notable countries of origin include the Philippines (12%), South Korea (8%), and Vietnam (7%).[43]

Support for undocumented students is critical to ensuring equitable access throughout their academic journeys, particularly in the face of growing threats to their safety and security. California law AB 540[44] allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition and access financial aid through the California Dream Act Application (CADAA), with nearly 38,000 students[45] availing themselves of the opportunity for the 2024-25 school year. However, many students are understandably hesitant[46] to identify themselves in order to apply for such support. Over the past decade, the number of first-time CADAA applicants has decreased by an average of 6.8% annually.[47] In response to this decline, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC), in partnership with Immigrants Rising, the California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (CASFAA), the California Undocumented Higher Education Coalition (CUHEC), and Institutional Solutions, launched the "I Heart California Dream Act" campaign[48] to raise awareness of financial aid opportunities for undocumented and other immigration-impacted students and to proactively address declining application rates.

Research conducted by UCLA's Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Initiative found that arrests and detentions of individuals of Asian descent by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) surged during the first half of the Trump administration.[49] The rise of ICE activity reflects a broader

climate of heightened immigration enforcement that is a growing concern nationwide for immigrants, including students. Documented attacks on student rights have emerged in states such as Tennessee,[50] Minnesota,[51] New York,[52] and Texas,[53] raising concerns about how immigration enforcement policies intersect with the operations and responsibilities of higher education institutions. Government overreach in support of investigations has extended beyond traditional immigration enforcement to include the use of non-immigration data sources and surveillance tools.[54] These practices create the potential for administrative data to be repurposed, putting undocumented students at risk. These developments make data privacy protections in higher education critical.

Ripple effects of these policies are an additional concern. Without rigorous safeguards that instill a sense of trust between student and institution, students may avoid completing forms or accessing support services that require disclosing personal information, resulting in a chilling effect that undermines both student well-being and institutional efforts to support students. The recent rescission of a policy limiting immigration enforcement's ability to operate on college campuses[55] exacerbates these concerns. Beyond the obvious and very real potential for immediate safety violations, the presence of ICE and data privacy concerns can affect a student's sense of belonging on campus. When students fear that their personal information could be used against them, they may avoid engaging with faculty and staff or sharing data, hindering institutions from understanding the barriers undocumented students face and limiting their ability to provide support.

Institutional leadership plays a significant role in protecting undocumented students. Institutions must establish and enforce policies that protect student privacy, such as the implementation of clear protocols for managing sensitive data. The current federal administration has shown an eagerness to use the threat of revoking federal funding[56] to get its way, and in some cases[57] have succeeded. Higher education leaders must continue to support their undocumented students by implementing and strengthening both physical and digital protections to ensure that their campuses remain safe havens in increasingly turbulent times.

"As a first-generation college student, the beginning of my higher education journey can best be described as amorphous. I felt like I was putting together a shapeless puzzle with missing pieces."

Isabella Lee
Graduate, UC Davis

In Their Own Words: LaVon Nightingale "Vonnie" Smith

Student at UCLA

"Having a few Pacific Islander faculty on campus has been incredibly meaningful for students like me, as it provides mentorship, guidance, and validation that our perspectives belong in academic spaces."

My name is LaVon Nightingale "Vonnie" Smith, a Tongan student at UCLA. I grew up in the Bay Area in predominantly white schools, where Pacific Islanders were rarely represented, but my family and community emphasized the importance of education. In Pacific Islander communities, pursuing higher education is not just about individual success — it is about creating opportunities that uplift our families and communities, and I came to college knowing my journey represented something bigger than myself.

As I continued my educational journey, I began to recognize the challenges of navigating institutions that were not necessarily built with students like me in mind. As a Pacific Islander student, I often looked around classrooms and campus spaces and saw very few people who shared my background. At UCLA, Pacific Islander students currently make up less than 1% of the campus population, which can make the experience feel isolating at times. Pacific Islanders are also often grouped into the broader "Asian American and Pacific Islander" category, which can make our communities feel invisible and hide the specific barriers we face in accessing and navigating higher education. When our experiences are not clearly represented in data or conversations about equity, it becomes more difficult for institutions and policymakers to understand the resources and support Pacific Islander students need to succeed.

I became involved in the Pacific Islands' Student Association (PISA) and now serve as president, helping build spaces for Pacific Islander students to celebrate culture, develop leadership, and support one another academically and personally. Having a community that understands your background can powerfully help students feel they belong, and there needs to be a stronger, more consistent presence of Pacific Islander faculty across departments so students see themselves reflected throughout the university. My hope is that my education will allow me to continue advocating for Pacific Islander students and expanding pathways to higher education, as their support, representation, and voice strengthen individuals, families, and communities.

Representation in Higher Education Leadership

Student–faculty ratios can be used to examine the representation of faculty members who share students' racial and ethnic identities. Across California's public higher education systems, disparities exist in student–to-faculty ratios among white, Asian American, and NHPI populations.

AANHPI students do not see themselves represented among their faculty at rates equal to white students.

Table 3. Undergraduate Students Per Full-Time Faculty Member of the Same Race/Ethnicity.

System	CCC	UC	CSU
Asian	53	20	29
NHPI	32	31	74
White	27	5	12

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. 12-month Enrollment, Undergraduate Total – 2023-24. Full-time instructional staff by academic rank, faculty and tenure status, race/ethnicity, and gender (Fall 2024).

The consistency of this pattern across systems spotlights a structural imbalance in faculty representation that disproportionately affects Asian American and NHPI students.

While no student requires a faculty member of the same race to succeed, large gaps in representation reflect institutional conditions that shape whose identities and experiences are most visible within academic spaces.

Inequities in California higher education extend beyond access and affordability and into the composition of the professoriate itself, shaping the extent to which students encounter faculty who reflect the diversity of the populations they serve.

For more information about representation across California higher education, including analysis by race/ethnicity, sector, and administrative body, see our 2023 "Still Left Out" report.

ASIAN AMERICAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

Since 2009, the U.S. Department of Education has awarded grants through its AANAPISI program to colleges and universities where AANHPI students make up at least 10% of the student population.[58] These institutions must also demonstrate that they enroll a high proportion of low-income students[59] and have a low average educational and general expenditure per full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student.[60] The program was designed to serve AANHPI students by funding initiatives aimed at enhancing institutional capacity, implementing support services, and improving student outcomes.[61]

However, as of September 2025, the U.S. Department of Education ended funding, including AANAPISI grants, for several MSI grant programs, withdrawing $350 million in discretionary funds nationwide.[62] California is home to the largest number of MSI programs in the nation, with 161 institutions across community colleges, public universities, and private institutions having received funding through the MSI program.[63]

Following the MSI funding cuts, the CCC system is projected to lose $20 million,[64] CSU campuses are expected to lose $43 million,[65] and the UC is projected to lose $1.1 million.[66] Although all nine undergraduate UC campuses have AANAPISI designation,[67] only one campus, UC Berkeley, was awarded a grant that was scheduled to be distributed over the next three years.

Laney College, a community college near Oakland's Chinatown, can no longer leverage the AANAPISI grants it has had for 15 years to run the Asian Pacific American Student Success (APASS) program. During that time, APASS built an ecosystem of support including full time designated counselors and student ambassadors to ensure that its AANHPI students had access to one-on-one academic and career counseling, support finding internships and scholarships, and peer mentorship.[68] Nearly one-quarter (22%) of Laney's student population identifies as AANHPI, leaving a significant portion of students without centralized support.

"I nearly left engineering halfway through college. Through my involvement in my university's Pilipinx American organization, I came to understand the critical importance of Pilipina representation in STEM."

Jessey Luisette Pingol
San José State University

Funding for MSIs plays a significant role in supporting historically underserved students and strengthening institutional capacity and resources. AANAPISI-funded programs like APASS have demonstrated positive returns for both students and institutions. Research shows that MSIs contribute to increased economic mobility, with graduates of funded MSIs reporting higher median earnings than their peers.[69] These programs are also associated with higher persistence rates, improved graduation rates, and increased degree attainment.[70] Without access to these investments, AANAPISIs are at risk of losing their capacity to sustain initiatives with proven track records for supporting students who have historically faced systemic barriers to access and complete higher education.

Sacramento State Full Circle Project

Established in 2012 through a AANAPISI grant,[71] Sacramento State's Full Circle Project (FCP) supports Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), first-generation, and low-income students through comprehensive services such as peer mentoring, advising, scholarships, and career counseling to improve retention and graduation outcomes.[72] Initially a 75-student cohort, FCP has grown to serve over 100 students annually[73] and has expanded to include initiatives like the CSU system's first APIDA-focused living-learning community. The Full Circle Project was also highlighted in our last edition of the State of Higher Education report for its regional partnership between Sacramento State and Los Rios Community College District's four campuses, focused on strengthening transfer pathways and improving completion rates.

ECONOMIC OUTCOMES AFTER GRADUATION

Examining earnings outcomes after graduation provides insight into how higher education translates into long-term economic mobility for Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) graduates of California public universities. Two years after graduation, Asian American and NHPI CSU graduates with only a bachelor's degree each earn a median income of roughly $58,000, slightly above the systemwide total. Even at this early career stage, AANHPI graduates already earn about $7,000 more than the median salary for an adult Californian, with essentially no gap between Asian American and NHPI graduates.

These patterns persist as careers progress. Fifteen years after graduation, Asian American graduates reach a median income of $103,600, while NHPI graduates earn $101,100, compared to $98,300 for all CSU graduates. Although all groups experience substantial earnings growth over time, Asian American and NHPI graduates consistently maintain a modest but persistent earnings premium across each career stage, with Asian American graduates earning slightly more than their NHPI peers.

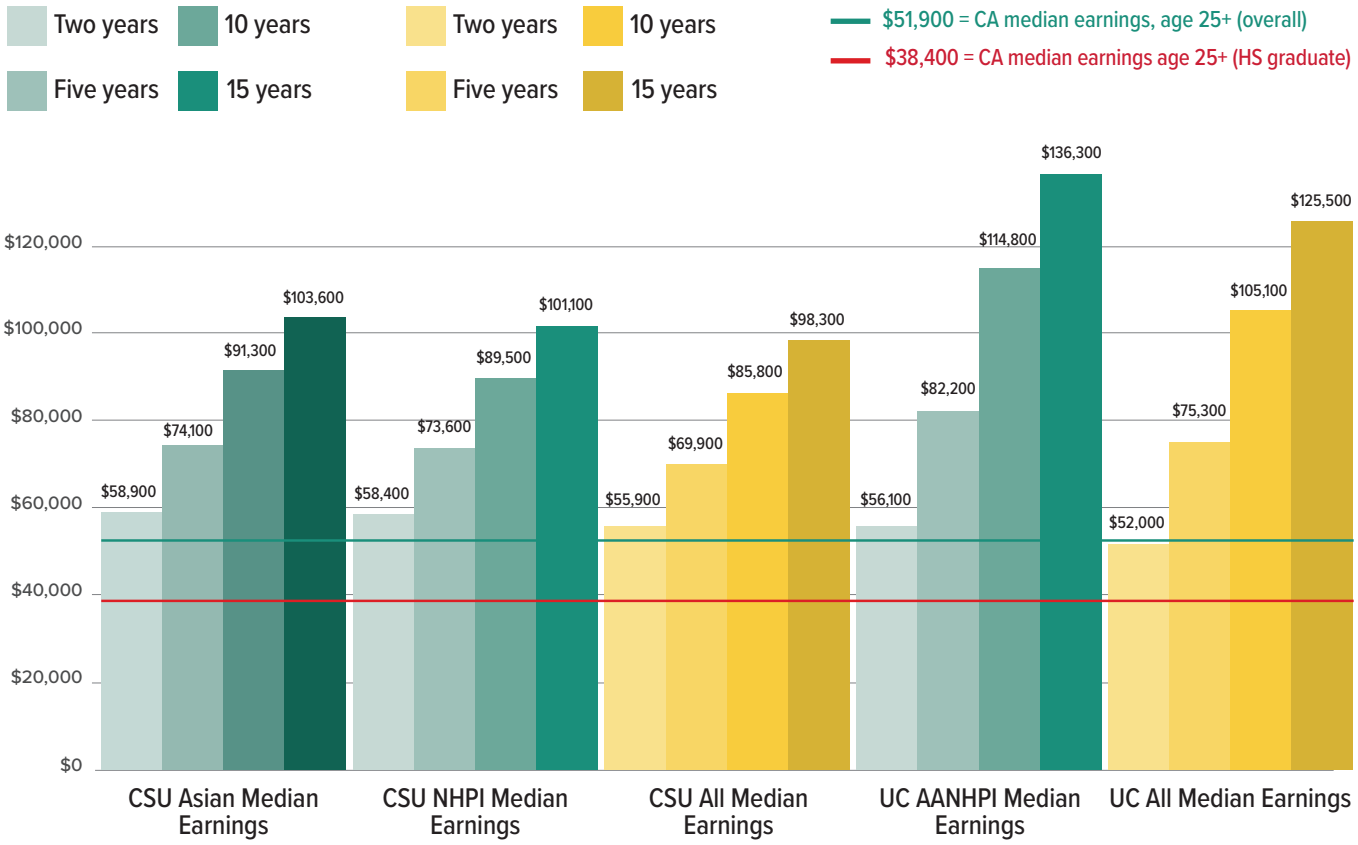
The UC reports alumni earnings outcomes with a combined AANHPI category, without the ability to disaggregate further. Without more granular data, it is impossible to examine post-graduate earnings for NHPI students, as they constitute a fraction of the total AANHPI population.

Two years after graduation, AANHPI UC graduates earn a median income of $56,100, compared to $52,000 for the average UC graduate. As careers progress, the earnings gap widens. Fifteen years after graduation, AANHPI graduates reach a median income of $136,300, substantially higher than the median income for both the average UC graduate and AANHPI graduates of the CSU.

"My pursuit of higher education is deeply rooted in my parents' journey as Vietnam War refugees who arrived in the U.S. with limited resources, but unwavering resilience. Their sacrifices inspired me to become the first in my family to earn a college degree, using education as a pathway toward long-term economic mobility and stability."

Evelyn Tran
Graduate, San José State University

Median earnings of Asian, NHPI, AANHPI and All CSU and UC graduates by years after graduation (2002-2019 cohort, Bachelors only)



Source: California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office, Postsecondary Employment and Earnings Reports. Available from: https://tableau.calstate.edu/views/LaborMarketOutcomes/LaborMarketDashboard?%3Aiid=1%3AiframeSizedToWindow&%3Aembed=y&%3Arender=true&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&% • United States Census Bureau. Table S2001: Earnings in the past 12 months (in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars) — California (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). Available from: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2001?q=median+individual+income+california.

Source: University of California Office of the President, Institutional Research and Academic Planning. Available from: https://www universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/alumni-grad-outcomes • U.S. Census Bureau. Table S2001: Earnings in the past 12 months (in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars) — California (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). Available from: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2001?q=median+individual+income+california.

Return on Investment

A college degree is a uniquely powerful engine of economic mobility. However, the return on investment for a degree varies considerably across higher education sectors, institutions, or even between students within the same institution from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Earlier this year, the College Futures Foundation, in partnership with the HEA Group, released Golden Returns: A Regional Look at the Return on Investment of California's Community and Career Colleges[74]

and their 4-Year California Mobility Index[75] in an attempt to shine a light on the variation in the return on investment (ROI) of roughly 400 colleges and universities across California. By incorporating "net price"—the price that students pay out of pocket after all grants and scholarships are deducted — and the median earnings of students 10 years after graduation relative to the average wage of a high school graduate, researchers calculated how long it would take the average graduate of each institution to recoup the cost of their education.

Earnings data used to calculate ROI rates are sourced from the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard, which unfortunately does not currently collect earnings data disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

The following analysis — using methods adapted from a previous Campaign report delving into the availability of college-preparatory coursework[76] — aims to circumvent this limitation by comparing the average ROI of colleges and universities with the highest and lowest shares of students from a particular group — in this case, Asian American and NHPI students — as a proxy for examining those rates for that student population in isolation. This was accomplished by grouping institutions from each sector into quartiles based on the undergraduate total enrollment share for each racial/ethnic group. The first quartile (Q1) contains institutions with the lowest enrollment share of Asian American or NHPI students, while the fourth quartile (Q4) contains the highest. Due to the smaller population size of NHPI students (NHPI students are nowhere near a substantial plurality among even Q4 colleges), the variance in share size between quartiles is less dramatic than it is for other groups. As a result, findings for NHPI students should be interpreted with caution.

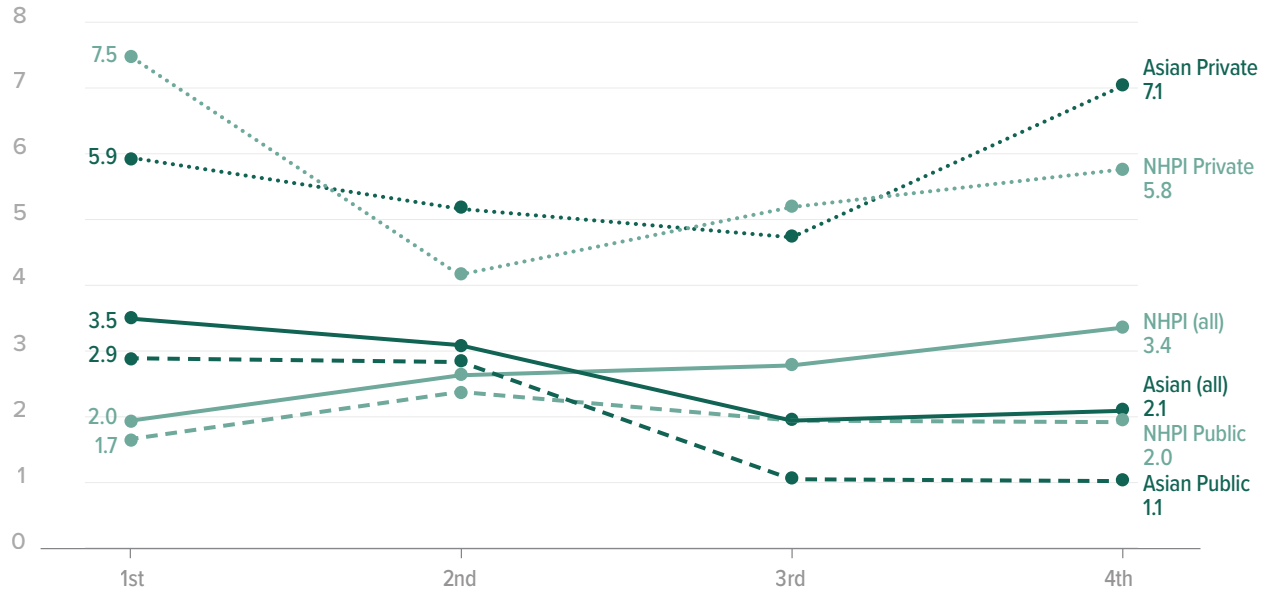
Two Year Institutions

The ROI rates for graduates from California's two-year colleges diverge, depending on whether institutions are grouped by Asian American or NHPI enrollment. At colleges with the highest shares of Asian American students (Q4), graduates recoup their educational costs about 1.5 years quicker than graduates from colleges with the lowest Asian American enrollment (Q1). In contrast, the pattern flips for NHPI enrollment. Graduates from Q1 NHPI institutions show the fastest ROI, at roughly two years, while those from Q4 schools take 3.4 years on average to recoup costs.

The underlying drivers behind these patterns differ as well. At institutions with high enrollment of Asian American students, faster returns stem primarily from higher earnings, as net costs remain relatively stable across quartiles. At institutions with high enrollment of NHPI students, costs are the primary driver of slower ROI rates. Graduates' median earnings do increase modestly from Q1 to Q4 institutions ($41,700 to $46,500), but net costs rise dramatically from $13,300 in Q1 to $34,400 in Q4, a difference that more than negates the additional earnings. This primarily cost-driven pattern closely mirrors findings at institutions with high Black student enrollment.[77]

Private two-year institutions face much worse returns than their public counterparts, mainly stemming from higher net costs.

Figure 22. Years to Recoup Net Costs (ROI) by Enrollment Quartile: Two-Year Institutions.



Enrollment data is based-off of IPEDS 2023-2024 total enrollment of degree- or certificate-seeking undergraduate students. Two-year institutions include all community colleges and other institutions whose primary award is an associate degree; private institutions granting primarily certificates as well as adult education schools are excluded from this analysis. Furthermore, 6 institutions are removed for having negative earnings premiums (no valid ROI) and 2 more are omitted for being outside the state of California.

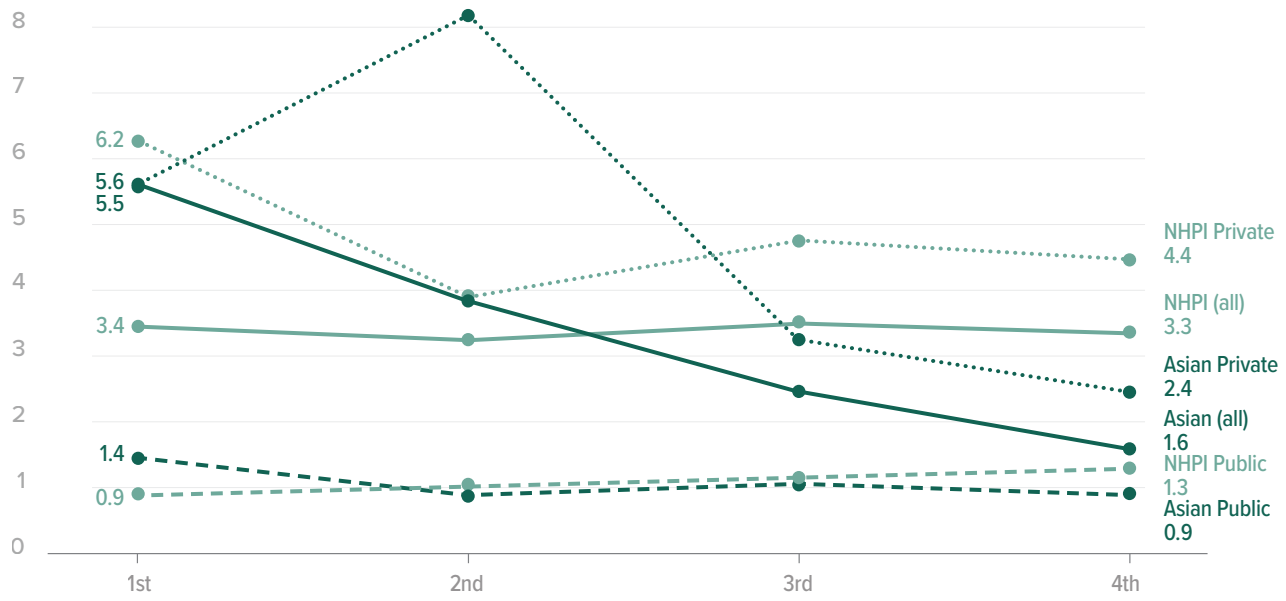
Four-Year Institutions

The four-year sector shows an even starker contrast. At Q4 institutions grouped by Asian American enrollment, graduates recoup costs in about 1.6 years, compared to 5.5 years for Q1 institution graduates — the largest observed difference across all race/ethnicities. At Q4 institutions, Asian American students benefit from both lower net costs ($64,700 vs. $81,600) and higher median graduate earnings ($77,300 vs. $54,900).

For graduates from four-year institutions grouped by NHPI enrollment, ROI remains relatively flat: between 3.3 to 3.5 years across quartiles. Graduates' net costs rise substantially between Q1 and Q4 ($62,100 to $86,400), while their median earnings remain close to flat ($65,000 to $68,000). Unintuitively, rising costs do not reflect noticeably higher ROI times; however, once three outlier institutions — all with ROI values more than two standard deviations above the mean — are removed, the pattern between cost and ROI strengthens, leading to longer ROI rates for graduates of Q4 versus Q1 institutions.

Asian and NHPI graduates from public universities recoup their educational costs in under two years.

Figure 23. Years to Recoup Net Costs (ROI) by Enrollment Quartile: Four-Year Institutions.



Enrollment data is based-off of IPEDS 2023-2024 total enrollment of degree- or certificate-seeking undergraduate students. Two-year institutions include all community colleges and other institutions whose primary award is an associate degree; private institutions granting primarily certificates as well as adult education schools are excluded from this analysis. Furthermore, 6 institutions are removed for having negative earnings premiums (no valid ROI) and 2 more are omitted for being outside the state of California.

Private vs. Public Institutions

We find substantial variation in graduates' ROI rates, both among ethnic groups and between public and private colleges. **For graduates of public institutions, rates show almost no variance across quartiles for either Asian American or NHPI graduates**, meaning that demographic makeup has little to no impact on ROI times. By contrast, **private institutions have much more varied rates** depending on their demographic makeup, underscoring troubling equity gaps.

In the two-year public sector, institutions grouped by Asian American enrollment demonstrate an improving ROI for graduates as enrollment concentration increases (2.9 years at Q1 to 1.1 years at Q4), while institutions grouped by NHPI enrollment show a flat pattern (1.7 to 2.0 years). Private two-year institutions show longer recoupment times across both groups, though data is limited by missing earnings information from many for-profit colleges.

Among four-year institutions, public universities (UC and CSU campuses) show flat ROI across all quartiles for both Asian American and NHPI graduates, who recoup costs within 1 to 1.5 years — consistent with findings for institutions grouped by Black student enrollment. The sole departure from this trend is a slight worsening for NHPI enrollment groupings in the public sector (0.85 years at Q1 to 1.29 years at Q4). Notably, when grouping public universities by Asian American enrollment, the flatness derives from increasing net costs and median earnings that largely cancel each other out. When grouping by NHPI enrollment, this is not the case, as while costs do increase from Q1 to Q4 institutions, earnings do not follow suit. Private four-year institutions show improving ROI at higher enrollment concentrations for both groupings, though the gap is larger among Asian American graduates than it is for NHPI graduates.

Discussion and Implications

Higher Asian American enrollment concentration at an institution **consistently correlates with faster ROI for graduates, driven primarily by higher expected median earnings**. Higher NHPI enrollment concentration more closely resembles patterns observed for institutions with high enrollment of Black students, particularly in the two-year, community college sector, where costs rather than earnings drive the disparities.

Earnings data is unavailable for many for-profit universities, leaving many institutions necessarily excluded from this analysis. Given that for-profit institutions have higher costs than public universities, and that NHPI students are disproportionately enrolled in for-profit institutions, it is likely our results understate the degree to which private colleges with high NHPI enrollment shares have poor ROI outcomes.

Additionally, this analysis pertains to graduates only. Students who leave college without earning a degree do not receive the benefits in earnings potential that a degree confers, which dramatically decreases their educational ROI.

Public institutions demonstrate that equitable outcomes are achievable. The UC and CSU campuses deliver consistent ROI, regardless of demographic composition, with graduates recouping costs within two years. The challenges lie in the private sector, where costs and outcomes vary substantially by institution. Our findings underscore the importance of continued investment in public higher education and the need for more granular data to enable further analysis.

CONCLUSION

Higher education remains an engine of economic mobility. However, when inequitable outcomes in degree attainment persist, disparities are reproduced, preventing students from fully realizing the potential benefits. Treating a group as a monolith should not be mistaken for unity, even if the accompanying stereotypes present positively. While some Asian American subgroups have relatively high educational outcomes, these realities are not shared across all Asian American communities. Many NHPI and Southeast Asian American groups experience disparate outcomes, the result of inequitable educational experiences that begin early and subsequently impact long-term outcomes, including higher rates of poverty, lower rates of educational attainment, and limited earning potential.

The aggregation of data masks disparities, minimizes subgroups' challenges and restricts the ability to design targeted interventions, leading to one-size-fits-all solutions. At the same time, efforts to improve data transparency must be paired with protecting personal information, especially for undocumented students. Only through centering disaggregated data with equity and privacy can institutions build systems that are effective and responsive to students' needs.

This report calls on policymakers and college leaders to move beyond acknowledgment toward implementation by investing in our historically minoritized students and closing the gaps that too often remain hidden in aggregate metrics. California's identity has always been shaped by the contributions of immigrants and native communities alike, including Asian American and NHPI populations whose labor and talent have long been central to the state's growth — from its earliest industries to its modern economy. Honoring that legacy requires a sustained commitment to equity, ensuring that our higher education system fulfills its role as a true engine of opportunity for all.

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DATA & METHODS

Twelve-month enrollment figures for the 2023-2024 academic year were taken from the IPEDS 2024 survey year. First-time student and transfer student enrollment data for fall 2024 was taken from the 2024 survey year. The IPEDS data used excludes less-than-two-year institutions.

Additional data was collected from the California Department of Education, CSU Institutional Research and Analyses, and the UC Office of the President. Outcomes data is included through 2023-2024 or the most recent year/cohort for which data was available.

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Demographic data was pulled from the American Community Survey (ACS), which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Where applicable, this report utilizes data from tables produced by the U.S. Census Bureau that was based on the 2019-2023 ACS five-year estimates.

Analyses of ROI utilized earnings and net price data was sourced from the College Futures Foundation's "Golden Returns" and "4-Year California Mobility Index" projects in conjunction with enrollment data from the National Center for Education Statistics' IPEDS surveys.

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