



**New Mexico
Local News
Fund**

Higher Education

A New Mexico Local News Fund Backgrounder

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Overview

A college degree is often seen as the ticket out of poverty, and this is especially true in New Mexico. The state's higher education system is dominated by three major public research universities and supplemented by a sprawling net of branch campuses and a powerful, popular array of community colleges. The result is a system meant to serve residents spread out over a geographically large state, by providing options that are broadly accessible and very affordable compared to other states. Its [unusual structure](#), with nearly two dozen governing boards, has been criticized as top-heavy, duplicative and expensive.

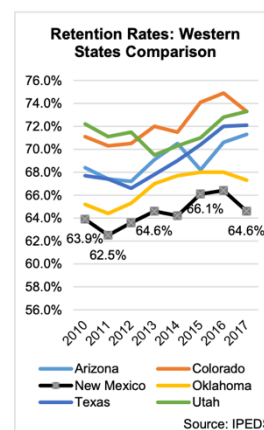
Many stakeholders are working on increasing the reach of higher education in the state. Most university graduates are women, and a majority are Hispanic or Native American.

The Higher Education Department's Route to 66 initiative aims to see 66 percent of working age New Mexicans earn a degree or certificate after high school. Despite this, our [rate of educational attainment](#) continues to trail neighboring states. About a third of young adults in New Mexico are enrolled in college and just over [a quarter of New Mexicans](#) have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Nationally, college enrollment is up significantly since 2000, but New Mexico trails its neighbors in keeping students in college. State enrollment has declined in recent years, and, along with shrinking scholarships and decreasing state and local funds, [threatens to increase the cost of college](#).

Many undergraduates face additional challenges while pursuing a degree. Nontraditional students—older students who may be working full time and raising families—make up an increasing amount of the student body. Many are the first in their families to go to college. Many face economic insecurity. For a variety of reasons, fewer than three-quarters of freshman in the state come back to their four-year schools the next fall.

Administrators have fought to attract and keep students by focusing on recruitment, retention and helping community college students transition to four-year universities. For example, schools have expanded dual-credit programs, giving more high school students a taste of the college experience. While more students are graduating from high school, fewer of them are going to college. But the effects are uneven. [UNM's freshman class shrank](#) by 13 percent between 2014 and 2019, while NMSU's first year cohorts grew by nearly 22 percent. State analysts don't fully understand these trends.



[Source: NM Legislative Finance Committee](#)

Public research institutions dominate, but more students attend community colleges

New Mexico has 24 public colleges and universities and four tribal schools. Since 2005 they have been overseen by the state [Higher Education Department](#), which in 2020 had a [staff of 37](#) (its goal is 50) and [an approved budget](#) of \$116 million (more than half of which is earmarked for student financial aid).

The department's funding comes from the state general fund, the federal government and proceeds from oil and gas activity on state lands.

The [University of New Mexico](#) is the state's flagship university and the largest four-year school, offering more than 90 undergraduate degrees plus schools of medicine, law, business and engineering. UNM is one of only 12 [Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#) with very high research activity. [Enrollment in fall 2019](#) was 15,899 in Albuquerque,

with an additional 6,893 across four branch campuses. Total enrollment was down 16.67% over the past five years. Fall 2019 tuition was \$3,361.

[New Mexico State University](#) is a land-grant university with a 900-acre campus in Las Cruces. NMSU is known for programs in engineering, agricultural science, education and business, but most students graduate from the school of arts and sciences. Its Aggies are the primary rivals of UNM's Lobos. The [fall 2018 enrollment](#) in Las Cruces was 14,297, with about 10,000 more students across four branch campuses. In Las Cruces the student body is 56.6% female and 57.8% Hispanic. Fall 2019 tuition was \$3,543.

[The New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology](#), located in Socorro, is a nationally recognized science and engineering school with programs in explosives, cybersecurity, petroleum recovery and other fields. It is home to the New Mexico Bureau of Geology, the National Cave and Karst Research Institute and the headquarters of the Very Large Array 27-dish radio telescope observatory. In Fall 2018 its [student body](#) of 1,886 students was 52.3 percent white and [70 percent male](#). Fall 2019 tuition was \$3,885.

Notably, community colleges have a much larger student body in the state. [Central New Mexico Community College](#) has six campuses and a higher enrollment than UNM, with 23,636 students in 2018. CNM, formerly known as Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute, awards about as many associate degrees as UNM awards bachelor's degrees each year. [Popular degree and certificate programs](#) range from film production to beer brewing, nursing, culinary arts, welding and early childhood multicultural education.

[St. John's College](#) in Santa Fe is best-known private school. The school's original campus in Annapolis, Maryland, was founded in 1696 as King William's School. The Santa Fe campus opened in 1964. Both are known for a curriculum based on great books. The Santa Fe campus offers a master's degree in Eastern classics.

Private, for-profit institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, do have a presence in New Mexico but are not discussed here.



4-YEAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- 1 - Eastern New Mexico University, Portales
- 2 - New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas
- 3 - New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, Socorro
- 4 - New Mexico State University, Las Cruces
- 5 - Northern New Mexico College, Española
- 6 - The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque
- 7 - Western New Mexico University, Silver City

2-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- 8 - Central New Mexico Community College, Albuquerque
- 9 - Clovis Community College, Clovis
- 10 - Mesalands Community College, Tucumcari
- 11 - New Mexico Junior College, Hobbs
- 12 - San Juan College, Farmington
- 13 - Santa Fe Community College, Santa Fe
- 14 - Luna Community College, Las Vegas
- 15 - New Mexico Military Institute, Roswell

2-YEAR BRANCH COMMUNITY COLLEGES

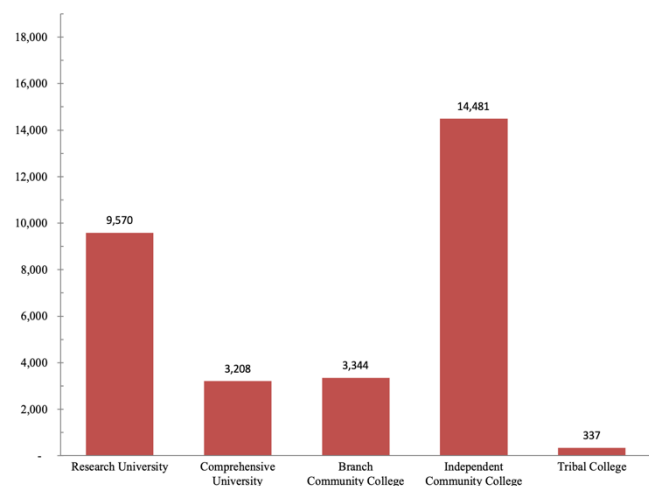
- 16 - ENMU - Roswell
- 17 - ENMU - Ruidoso
- 18 - NMSU - Alamogordo
- 19 - NMSU - Carlsbad
- 20 - NMSU - Doña Ana
- 21 - NMSU - Grants
- 22 - UNM - Gallup
- 23 - UNM - Los Alamos
- 24 - UNM - Taos
- 25 - UNM - Valencia

TRIBAL COLLEGES

- 26 - Diné College, Shiprock
- 27 - Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe
- 28 - Navajo Technical Institute, Crownpoint
- 29 - Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, Alb

Source: Your Guide to NM Colleges and Universities (NM HED)

Degree Production by Institution Sector



Source: NMHED Degree and Certificate Production Report

Indian Education

New Mexico has a separate system of tribally funded institutions of higher education. All four were conceived in the 1960s and '70s and have expanded and evolved since then.

[The Institute of American Indian Arts](#) in Santa Fe is the only college in the world devoted to contemporary Native American Art. Founded in 1962, it accepts Native and non-Native students into degree programs in cinematic arts, Native American art history, museum studies and studio and performing arts. It also offers a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing.

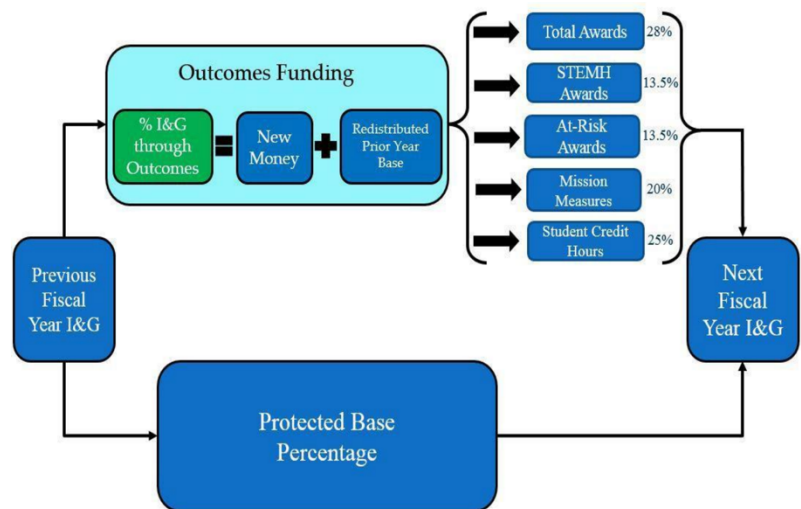
[Diné College](#) is controlled by the Navajo Nation, whose territory encompasses parts of Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. When it was established in 1968 as Navajo Community College, it was the [first tribally controlled college](#) in the country. Now there are 33 others. While the main campus is in Tsaile, Arizona, a branch campuses in Shiprock and a site in Crownpoint serve New Mexico students. It is known for its Center for Diné Studies, a Diné teacher education program, a uranium education program and a bachelor's degree in tribal management.

[Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute](#) was founded on Albuquerque's western flank by the All Indian Pueblo Council in 1971. In 1993 it became accredited as a community college. The school is known for its programs in culinary arts, business, early childhood education and environmental science, including natural resources management and GIS technology.

[Navajo Technical University](#) in Crownpoint began in 1979 as the Navajo Skill Center. Although it has fewer than 1,000 students, it is the largest tribal college in the country. It is known for programs in nursing, early childhood education and business, and it has a pioneering veterinary technician program. TCU also has facilities in Kirtland and Zuni, as well as Chinle and Teec Nos Pos, Arizona.

The Cost of Education

Traditionally, states have viewed educating their residents as a project worth paying for, and so have used various methods of reimbursing schools for what that education costs to provide. The effect has been to keep tuition lower for students, although an [increasing number of states](#) have taken to cutting higher ed funding and putting the bulk of the cost onto students. New Mexico uses what's known as the ["funding formula"](#) to distribute money among the 24 public colleges and universities for instruction and general support. Since 2012 it has been among a majority of states that have also tied that formula to performance on metrics like number of graduates.



Source: NM Higher Education Department

In 1996 a bipartisan group of state senate leaders introduced the idea of promoting higher education through a [scholarship program](#) funded by sales of lottery tickets. It is not a need-based scholarship; any student who graduates from a New Mexico high school and enrolls in a state (not tribal) school within 16 months after graduation is eligible for the program. Students must pay their own tuition for the first semester; the program kicks in after that. In order to keep the scholarship, students must attend full-time and maintain a 2.5 GPA (C-plus).

Lottery [ticket sales funneled \\$740 million](#) into the fund between 1996 and 2018, serving 117,000 students, slightly more than half of whom went on to graduate from college. Originally it paid full tuition, but demand and rising tuition costs have lowered that amount, which varies by school. In 2020 the Lottery Tuition Fund had an approved [budget of \\$42 million](#). The state awarded scholarships to 26,000 students in the 2019 fiscal year, the vast majority at UNM, NMSU and Tech. Because the coronavirus pandemic depressed sales in 2020, the fund was expected to [collect \\$5 million less](#) for the year.

Critics say the program's design—without any consideration for high school achievement or financial need—drains money from students who need it most. A diverse array of groups has pushed for changes to the program. [Voices for Children has argued](#) the program should be based on financial need. The non-partisan THINK New Mexico

successfully [pushed for cuts](#) to the program's administrative costs, and a requirement that 30% of revenues go to scholarships. The free-market [Rio Grande Foundation has criticized it](#) for not having stricter eligibility requirements and not focusing the aid on low-income students.

In 2020 the Legislature rejected Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's Opportunity Scholarship, a [nationally noticed proposal for free college tuition](#), but approved a revised plan that [pays the remaining costs](#) for Lottery Scholarship students at two-year schools.

After the failure of the Opportunity Scholarship, UNM introduced the [Lobo First-Year Promise](#), which will pay tuition and fees for New Mexico high school graduates whose families earn \$50,000 or less.



Source: Legislative Finance Committee

Resources

[New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Hearing Brief on Educational Attainment, 2019](#)

[Program Evaluation: Higher Education Cost Drivers and Cost Savings, an LFC report, 2017](#)

[Strengthening Higher Education and Tomorrow's Workforce, a background report from New Mexico First, 2018](#)

[Your Guide to New Mexico Colleges and Universities](#), from the Higher Education Department

[New Mexico Higher Education Department Annual Report](#)

[Fast Facts: Lottery and Lottery Scholarship](#), a report by the Legislative Finance Committee, 2018.

[Averting the Crisis: Making Lottery Success Scholarships Sustainable](#), by Fred Nathan and Kristina Fisher for Think New Mexico, 2006.

[Going Broke: Tuition, Financial Need and the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship Fund](#), by Gerald Bradley for Voices for Children, 2013.