

U.S. Department of Education

A First Look at 2024-25 FAFSA Race and Ethnicity Data



Office of the Chief Economist

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January 2025

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Introduction

The FAFSA Simplification Act (2020) required that anyone who completes a FAFSA form answer questions on their race/ethnicity. In the 2023-24 FAFSA cycle, the Department pilot tested this collection. It was fully implemented in 2024-25. The data collected represent one of the largest and most detailed datasets of race and ethnicity data currently in existence across the federal government. The FAFSA form asks respondents to select one or more among six racial and ethnic identities (American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic, Latino or Spanish; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and/or White). Within each major category (excepting American Indian or Alaska Native), one or more subcategories can be chosen, and an “other” write-in option is available as a subcategory for all six major categories.¹ The form also offers students a “Prefer not to answer” option, but less than 5% of FAFSA filers declined to identify their race or ethnicity.²

These data can help policymakers and researchers better understand the application for and take-up of Title IV aid programs. In this report, we provide a first look at the racial and ethnic characteristics of everyone who filed a FAFSA in the 2024-25 FAFSA cycle through October 31, 2024.³ It provides reporting frequencies of each of the six major race and ethnicity categories, separately by Pell eligibility and for all FAFSA filers and the subset of first-time FAFSA filers who would be first-time college attendees that recently graduated from high school (“first-time recent high school graduates”).⁴ The report also provides frequencies of race and ethnicity subgroups for the five major race and ethnicity categories for which the FAFSA provides preset subgroup options.⁵

The reporting of race and ethnicity data can be complex, especially when such detailed data is gathered across millions of individuals. In this report, we list the number of respondents who selected that racial or ethnic identity “alone” (i.e., it was the only selection made), “in combination” (i.e., it was chosen along with additional selections), and “alone or in combination” (i.e., the sum of “alone” and “in combination”).⁶ We believe this approach provides substantial detail on the number of FAFSA filers who select multiple race and ethnicity categories without listing all possible combinations of choices of major categories (of which

¹ The relevant FAFSA questions are presented in the Appendix.

² Providing a response or selecting “Prefer not to answer” was required for all online FAFSA filers; they could not skip either the ethnicity or race question. Filers who submitted the paper FAFSA could leave the race and ethnicity questions blank, and their answers would subsequently be coded as “prefer not to respond.” We estimate that this would have affected, at most, fewer than 1,500 submissions or less than 0.01% of the sample.

³ The complete 2024-25 FAFSA cycle ends June 30, 2025, so these data represent only a portion of the total number of FAFSA filers expected during the cycle. Future analyses that can be conducted once the cycle ends may reveal important differences in the timing of when particular groups submit FAFSA forms.

⁴ We define “first-time recent high school graduates” by limiting the sample to filers under age 20 who expect to be a first-year student in college and have a high school diploma.

⁵ Preset subgroup options are available for all of the major categories except American Indian or Alaskan Native. For this category, only a write-in subgroup option is available.

⁶ In response to OMB SPD 15, reporting race and ethnicity data will change across the federal government in the coming years. This report uses an extended version of OMB SPD 15 Approach 1 to report race and ethnicity identities.

there are 64). We note that respondents will be counted multiple times using this approach when selecting more than one race or ethnicity.⁷

Although Hispanic ethnicity was queried separately from race on the FAFSA, we treat it as a major category and report it along with the other major race categories.⁸ When reporting on subcategories of the major categories, we report the write-in “other” option as a separate subcategory in this report, although we acknowledge that overlooks substantial differences in identities within that group and leave analyzing such data—via manual processing of free-text entries—to future work.

Major Race and Ethnicity Categories of FAFSA Filers by Pell Grant Eligibility

In Table 1, we report the number of FAFSA filers by Pell Grant eligibility for each of the six major race and ethnicity categories on the 2024-25 FAFSA. As described above, the number of filers who chose only that race or ethnicity is listed in the “alone” row. The “in combination” row lists the number of filers who chose that race or ethnicity along with at least one other. For example, if a respondent chose both Hispanic and White, that person would be listed in the Hispanic “in combination” group and the White “in combination” group. The “alone or in combination” row reports the sum of the first two and reflects everyone who selected that race or ethnicity.

As seen with the “in combination” numbers, a sizable portion of FAFSA filers select multiple race and ethnicity identities. Across the full population, about 19% choose more than one major category, with Hispanic and White comprising over 60% of that group, which is reflected in the large portion of “in combination” among Hispanic filers. In contrast, Black or African American respondents are more likely to only select one racial category. We provide a list of the most commonly selected combinations of major race and ethnicity categories in Appendix Table 1.

For every group, there are more Pell eligible filers than not Pell eligible; however, there is wide variation in the percentage of Pell eligible filers across race and ethnicity. For example, Pell eligible Black or African American filers outnumber non-Pell eligible Black filers nearly four to one. In contrast, Asian filers are more evenly divided between Pell and not Pell eligible.

⁷ Future work that makes full use of detailed race and ethnicity data, with a particular eye towards the racial subgroup data, should be encouraged. The level of detail the FAFSA provides in the collection of data on race and ethnicity is rare, and researchers and policymakers should take full advantage of understanding the complexity of the multiple racial and ethnic identities FAFSA filers have.

⁸ Treating ethnicity in this manner aligns with the guidance provided by OMB SPD 15.

Table 1. Race and Ethnicity by Pell Eligibility: All FAFSA Filers

	Pell Eligible (1)	Not Pell Eligible (2)
<i>American Indian or Alaskan Native</i>		
Alone	81,241	25,559
In Combination	226,202	91,940
Alone or in Combination	307,443	117,499
<i>Asian</i>		
Alone	592,815	368,305
In Combination	178,518	148,794
Alone or in Combination	771,333	517,099
<i>Black or African American</i>		
Alone	2,356,587	554,893
In Combination	503,563	160,341
Alone or in Combination	2,860,150	715,233
<i>Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</i>		
Alone	28,289	10,005
In Combination	49,615	25,059
Alone or in Combination	77,904	35,064
<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>		
Alone	1,197,020	328,852
In Combination	1,716,628	648,180
Alone or in Combination	2,913,648	977,032
<i>White</i>		
Alone	3,523,355	2,782,165
In Combination	1,776,357	758,463
Alone or in Combination	5,299,712	3,540,626
<i>Prefer Not to Answer</i>	436,889	238,967
<i>Total</i>	10,360,079	5,189,172

Notes: All FAFSA filers for the 2024-25 school year through October 31, 2024 are used. Pell eligibility is calculated using SAI. A handful of observations have a missing SAI due to a rejected FAFSA still awaiting resubmission; those students are counted as not Pell eligible. Data come from Federal Student Aid. Total numbers reflect the full population of FAFSA filers by October 31, 2024. The sum of numbers across race and ethnicity does not equal the total because of multi-counting the filers who choose more than one race or ethnicity.

In Table 2, we replicate the analysis but limit the sample to only first-time recent high school graduates. The pattern across Pell and not Pell eligible shifts dramatically when focused on this subset of filers. American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students are fairly equally distributed across Pell eligible and not Pell eligible, a change from the full sample in which all three groups were much more likely to be Pell eligible. Larger

proportions of Asian and White first-time recent high school graduate filers are not Pell eligible than compared to the full population.

Table 2. Race and Ethnicity by Pell Eligibility: First-Time Recent High School Graduates

	Pell Eligible (1)	Not Pell Eligible (2)
<i>American Indian or Alaskan Native</i>		
Alone	6,942	5,803
In Combination	22,167	24,284
Alone or in Combination	29,109	30,087
<i>Asian</i>		
Alone	54,418	105,699
In Combination	18,965	44,193
Alone or in Combination	73,383	149,892
<i>Black or African American</i>		
Alone	179,821	123,301
In Combination	56,443	45,933
Alone or in Combination	236,264	169,234
<i>Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</i>		
Alone	2,615	2,532
In Combination	5,337	6,983
Alone or in Combination	7,952	9,515
<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>		
Alone	158,292	109,831
In Combination	207,011	190,391
Alone or in Combination	365,303	300,222
<i>White</i>		
Alone	289,189	666,078
In Combination	210,263	222,357
Alone or in Combination	499,452	888,435
<i>Prefer Not to Answer</i>	26,187	48,937
<i>Total</i>	968,759	1,318,910

Notes: First time FAFSA filers under age 20 with a high school diploma in their first year of college are used to proxy for recently graduated high school seniors. Pell eligibility is calculated using SAI. A handful of observations have a missing SAI due to a rejected FAFSA still awaiting resubmission; those students are counted as not Pell eligible. Data come from Federal Student Aid. Total numbers reflect the full population of first time recent high school FAFSA filers by October 31, 2024. The sum of numbers across race and ethnicity does not equal the total because of multi-counting the filers who choose more than one race/ethnicity.

Subcategories of Major Race and Ethnicity Categories

Five of the six major race and ethnicity categories on the 2024-25 FAFSA provide a set of optional subcategories of race and ethnicity. A respondent can choose one or more of the preset subcategories for any selected major race and ethnicity category. All six major categories provide an “other” option in which a filer can write in a free text response. In Table 3, we provide the number of FAFSA filers by subcategories for each of the five major race and ethnicity categories with preset subcategory response options.

Table 3. Subgroup Breakdowns: All FAFSA Filers

	Alone (1)	In Combination (2)	Alone or in Combination (3)
<i>White</i>			
German	286,267	1,274,552	1,560,819
Irish	304,726	1,340,929	1,645,655
English	965,974	1,040,296	2,006,270
Italian	213,063	550,119	763,182
Polish	88,822	396,373	485,195
French	48,383	402,706	451,089
Other	670,556	337,762	1,008,318
<i>Black</i>			
African American	2,316,285	151,897	2,468,182
Jamaican	82,768	54,806	137,574
Haitian	103,898	26,895	130,793
Nigerian	62,731	37,134	99,865
Ethiopian	27,234	7,401	34,635
Somali	24,666	3,553	28,219
Other	172,225	60,185	232,410
<i>Asian</i>			
Chinese	184,726	53,045	237,771
Filipino	249,787	29,574	279,361
Asian Indian	158,274	19,466	177,740
Vietnamese	145,784	24,208	169,992
Korean	102,819	10,573	113,392
Japanese	55,279	20,959	76,238
Other	252,063	35,884	208,109
<i>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</i>			
Native Hawaiian	34,510	4,519	39,029
Samoan	15,392	4,529	19,921
Chamorro	12,971	1,132	14,103

Tongan	3,952	2,088	6,040
Fijian	3,928	668	4,596
Marshallese	2,410	384	2,794
Other	17,747	1,943	19,690
<i>Hispanic</i>			
Mexican	1,883,515	202,087	2,085,602
Puerto Rican	471,956	89,564	561,520
Cuban	131,154	37,039	168,193
Other	1,125,879	237,126	1,363,005

Notes: Anyone who selected one of these subgroups is included in the analysis. In combination refers only to those who selected two or more subgroups in the same major race category. Filers through October 31, 2024 are included. Data come from Federal Student Aid.

Conclusion

This report provides initial findings from one of the newest and most detailed race and ethnicity data collection efforts across the federal government. We provide a first look at how these data are collected and report the racial and ethnic identities of the full population of FAFSA filers by midway through the Fall 2024 term. Using an expanded approach to race and ethnicity reporting recommended by the Office of Management and Budget, we break out FAFSA filers by race and ethnic identity along two other dimensions: Pell eligibility status and first-time recent high school graduate. Taking advantage of the large sample size, this report provides detailed breakdowns by subgroups of the major race and ethnicity identities. Across all FAFSA filers, there is a high reporting rate for selecting at least one race or ethnicity: fewer than 5% of filers declined to identify their race or ethnicity. There is also a high take-up rate of identifying a subgroup within the major race and ethnicity categories. Additionally, the free text entry option to identify one's racial or ethnic subgroup provides an opportunity to use particularly rich new data to better understand racial and ethnic identities, although this report leaves that to future work. As this data collection persists into the future, these data can help explore how race and ethnicity in this population may change over time and across different dimensions such as geography and age.⁹ We also expect these data to be linked to important outcomes like college enrollment and success in the future.

⁹ In response to OMB SPD 15, the Department will change the collection of race and ethnicity data for the 2026-27 FAFSA cycle to align with the new requirements including combining the race and ethnicity questions and adding a Middle Eastern and North African major race category.

Appendix Table 1. Most Common Combinations of Race and Ethnicity Major Categories

	Count	Share
Multiracial and/or Multiethnic	3,024,131	
Hispanic-White	1,825,451	60.4%
Hispanic-Black	241,066	8.0%
White-Black	239,447	7.9%
White-Asian	169,701	5.6%
White- American Indian	102,392	3.4%
Hispanic- American Indian	89,611	3.0%
Hispanic-White-Black	48,897	1.6%
Hispanic-Asian	43,991	1.5%
Hispanic-White-American Indian	39,731	1.3%
Black-Asian	30,957	1.0%
Black- American Indian	29,709	1.0%
All Other Combinations	163,224	5.4%

Notes: Filers who selected more than one major race or ethnicity category are included in multiracial and/or multiethnic. Filers through October 31, 2024 are included. Data are from Federal Student Aid.