

RESEARCH BRIEF

**The Importance of Strong Writing Skills:
*ENG 111 Performance and Student Success***

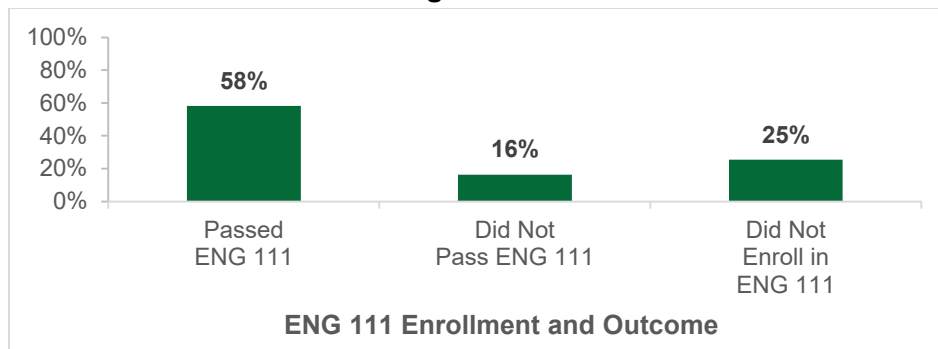
At NOVA, English 111 (*College Composition I*) serves as the entry-level college composition class. ENG 111 helps students to develop critical thinking skills and learn the fundamentals of academic writing. The purpose of ENG 111 is to prepare students for all other expected writing in college, as well as help students to develop writing skills for use in the workplace. Therefore, NOVA students who master the ENG 111 course objectives will be able to understand not only the writing process but also how to write effectively. As a result, the development of strong writing skills can help prepare students for success in future courses at NOVA and beyond college.

In This Brief

This Brief evaluates whether the development of strong writing skills promotes student learning and student success. To explore these trends, this Brief analyzes the relationship between student performance in ENG 111 and cumulative GPA, performance in subsequent courses at NOVA, and three-year outcomes (including graduation and transfer to a four-year institution).

Figure 1, below, provides an overview of student performance in ENG 111 for the Fall 2015 cohort of first-time in college students at NOVA.¹ Nearly three-fourths of the cohort enrolled in ENG 111 during their first year of enrollment, and almost sixty percent successfully completed the course.

**Figure 1. Enrollment and Success Outcomes in ENG 111
for First-Time in College Students: Fall 2015 Cohort**



*Total Cohort=11,487. See Table 1 in the Appendix for more details.

¹ Data tables in the Appendix section provide information regarding the Fall 2013 and Fall 2014 cohorts, in which similar trends were observed when compared to the Fall 2015 cohort.

Executive Summary

Evidence in this Brief suggests that the development of strong writing skills is critical to student success in college. Students who master the ENG 111 course objectives not only perform well in future courses at NOVA, but are also more likely to graduate or transfer to a four-year institution. Therefore, providing more opportunities for students to strengthen their writing skills can help prepare students for success in college and beyond.

Key Findings

Student Learning Outcomes

To evaluate student learning outcomes, this Brief analyzed a student's cumulative GPA at NOVA and their performance in subsequent courses based on their performance in ENG 111.

- **Cumulative GPA:** Students who did not pass ENG 111 had the lowest cumulative GPAs at NOVA. While this is partly driven by a failing grade in the ENG 111 course, there is evidence to suggest these students struggle to pass other courses as well.
 - Only six percent of students who did not pass ENG 111 earned a GPA of above 3.00 (a 'B' average) and a large majority—three-fourths—earned a GPA of less than 2.00 (less than a 'C' average).
 - Conversely, nearly half—48 percent—of students who passed ENG 111 had a cumulative GPA of 3.00 or higher.
- **Subsequent Course Performance:** Students who passed ENG 111 had high success rates in subsequent courses at NOVA, but students who earned an 'A' or 'B' in ENG 111 had the highest success rates.
 - Students who earned an 'A' or 'B' in ENG 111 had higher success rates than students who earned a 'C' in ENG 111, suggesting a high mastery of ENG 111 course objectives is critical to later success in college.

Student Success Outcomes

- **Three-Year Outcomes:** Students who passed ENG 111 had higher graduation and transfer rates than students who did not pass ENG 111.
 - Nearly 57 percent of students who passed ENG 111 either graduated or transferred within three years of initial enrollment, but only ten percent of students who failed ENG 111 graduated or transferred during this same time frame.
 - Furthermore, over two-thirds of students who failed ENG 111 were not successful by any metric. Within three years of initial enrollment at the College, this large number of students did not graduate, transfer to a four-year institution, or return to NOVA to complete their studies.

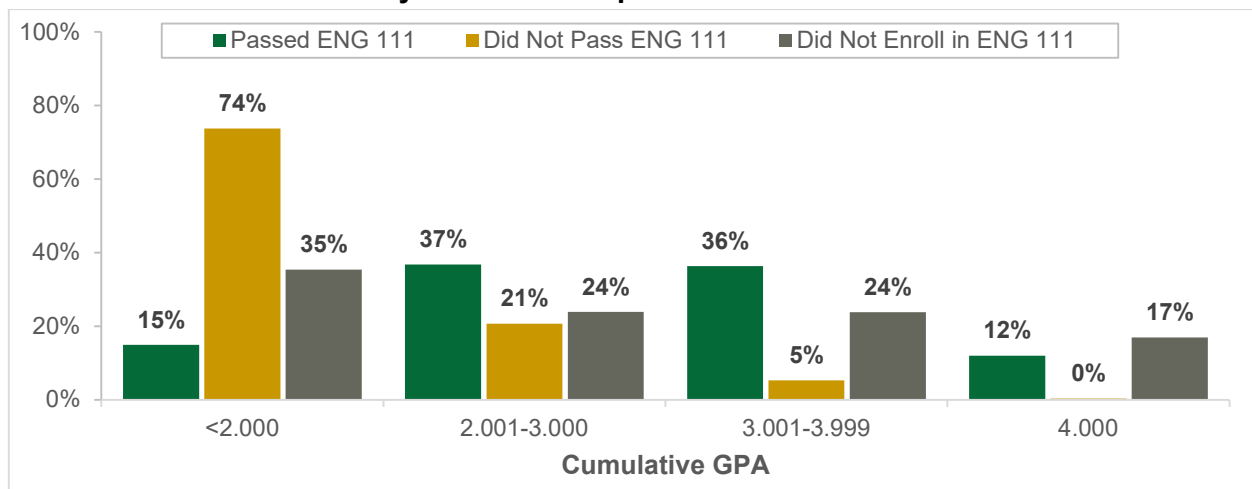
Section 1. Student Learning Outcomes

This section evaluates the impact of English 111 (ENG 111) performance on student learning at NOVA. Specifically, this section examines the student learning metrics of cumulative GPA over a three-year period and success rates in subsequent courses at NOVA.

Cumulative GPA

Students who did not pass ENG 111 had the lowest cumulative GPAs on average. In fact, nearly three-fourth of these students had a GPA lower than 2.00, and only six percent had a GPA higher than 3.00. Conversely, almost half of students who passed ENG 111 and 41 percent who did not enroll in ENG had a GPA higher than 3.00. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Cumulative GPA of First-Time in College Students by ENG 111 Completion Status: Fall 2015 Cohort



*n=11,485. See Table 2 in the Appendix for more details.

Performance in Subsequent Courses at NOVA

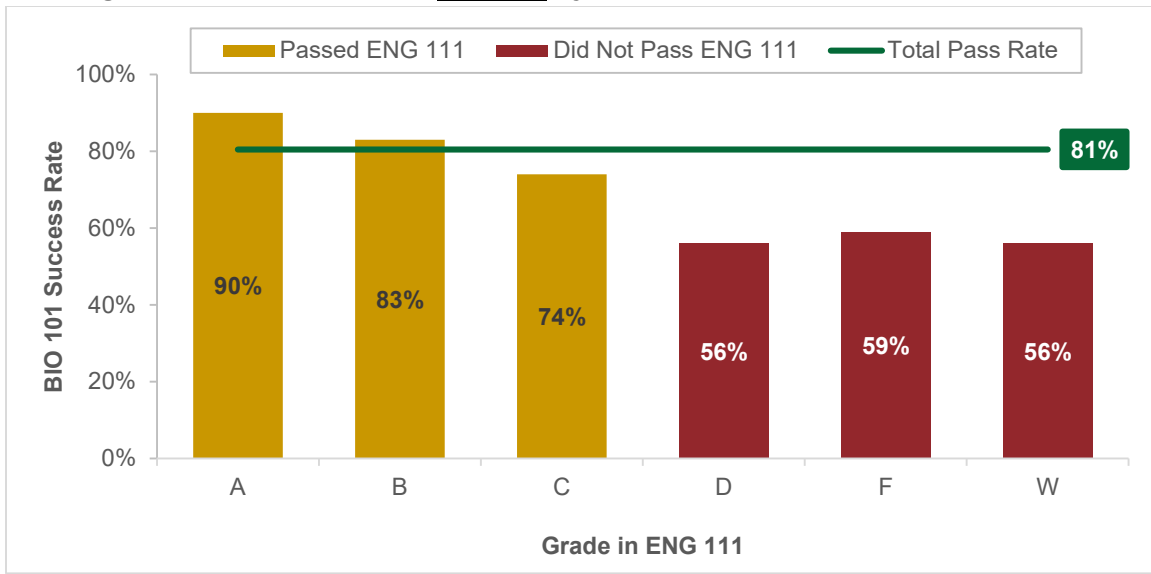
The “subsequent courses” explored in this Brief include: Biology 101, Biology 102, History 101, History 102, and Psychology 200. These courses represent only a small sample of subsequent courses students can choose to enroll in at NOVA. However, they were selected for the purpose of example in this analysis because they require high levels of literacy, are high-enrollment courses at NOVA, or are courses that are required by most transfer institutions.

It should be noted that students were not required to enroll in these subsequent courses, so sample sizes are substantially smaller than the overall cohort (see Figure 1). Further, performance in 102-level courses tends to be slightly higher and less variable on average than performance in 101-level courses. This is likely due to students needing to succeed in 101 before proceeding to 102; therefore, there is inherently some selection bias in more advanced courses.

Biology 101 and Biology 102

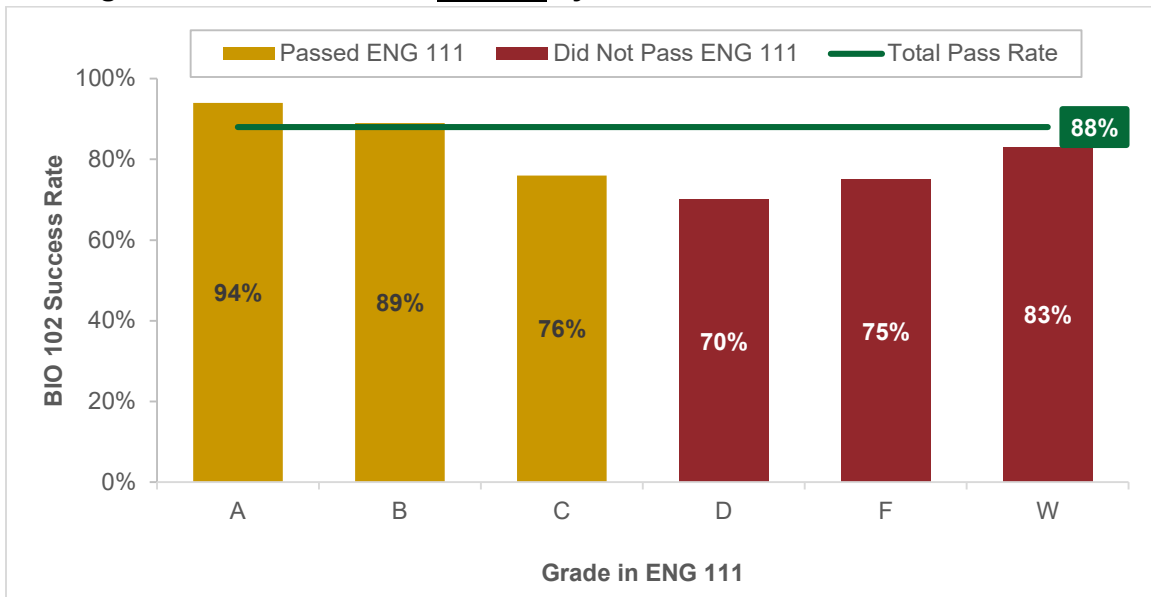
Overall, students who passed ENG 111 had higher success rates in subsequent biology courses than students who did not pass ENG 111. However, students who earned an 'A' in ENG 111 had the *highest* success rates—approximately 90 percent of students who received an 'A' in ENG 111 passed BIO 101 and 94 percent passed BIO 102. Conversely, students who did not pass ENG 111 had success rates substantially below average in these courses. (Figures 3 and 4)

Figure 3. Success Rate in BIO 101 by Grade in ENG 111: Fall 2015 Cohort



*n=1,490. See Table 3 in the Appendix for more details.

Figure 4. Success Rate in BIO 102 by Grade in ENG 111: Fall 2015 Cohort

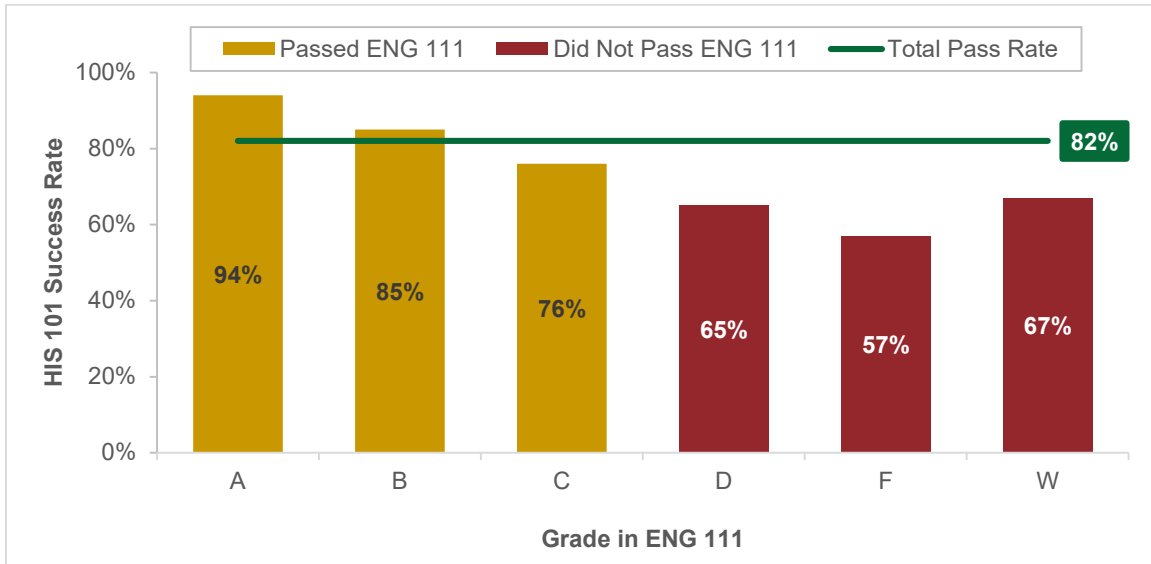


*n=1,042. See Table 4 in the Appendix for more details.

History 101 and History 102

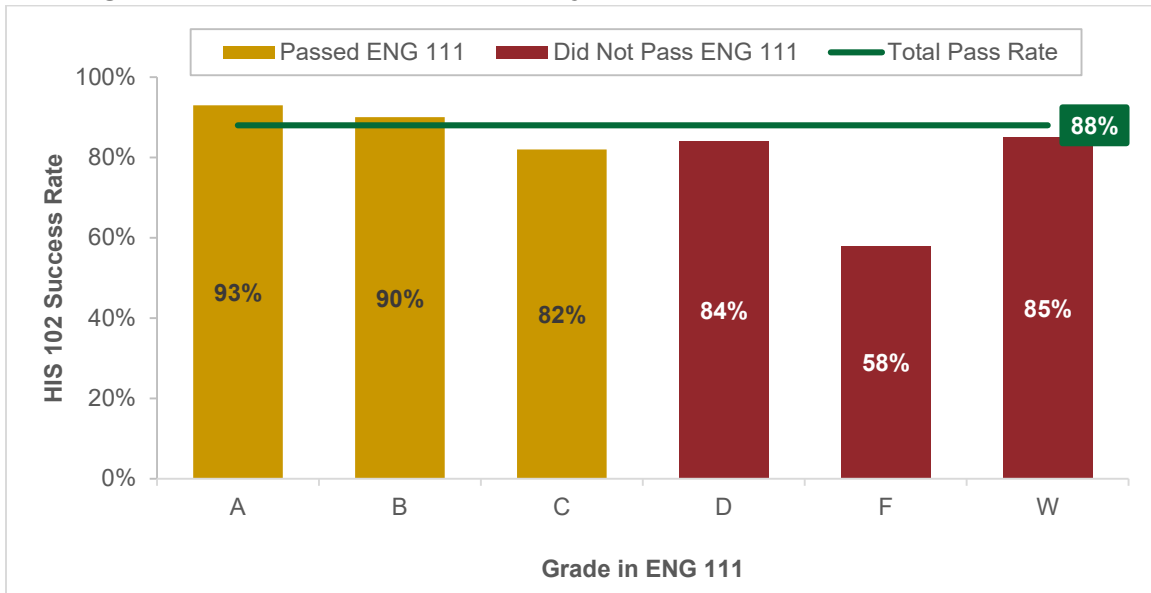
Overall, students who passed ENG 111 had higher success rates in subsequent history courses than students who did not pass ENG 111. However, students who earned an 'A' in ENG 111 had the *highest* success rates—approximately 94 percent of students who received an 'A' in ENG 111 passed HIS 101 and 93 percent passed HIS 102. Conversely, students who did not pass ENG 111 had success rates lower than average in subsequent history courses, with students earning an 'F' in ENG 111 performing the worst on average. (Figures 5 and 6)

Figure 5. Success Rate in HIS 101 by Grade in ENG 111: Fall 2015 Cohort



*n=1,924. See Table 5 in the Appendix for more details.

Figure 6. Success Rate in HIS 102 by Grade in ENG 111: Fall 2015 Cohort

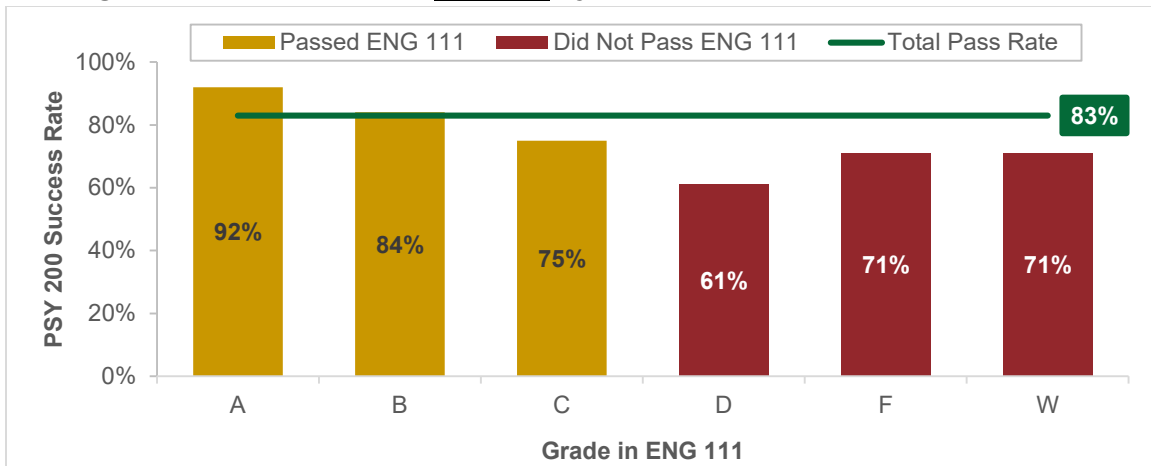


*n=842. See Table 6 in the Appendix for more details.

Psychology 200

Students who earned an 'A' in ENG 111 had the highest success rates in PSY 200—approximately 92 percent of students who received an 'A' in ENG 111 passed PSY 200. Conversely, students who did not pass ENG 111 performed the worst on average; only 61 percent of students who earned a 'D' and 71 percent of students who earned an 'F' in ENG 111 were successful in PSY 200. (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Success Rate in PSY 200 by Grade in ENG 111: Fall 2015 Cohort



*n=563. See Table 7 in the Appendix for more details.

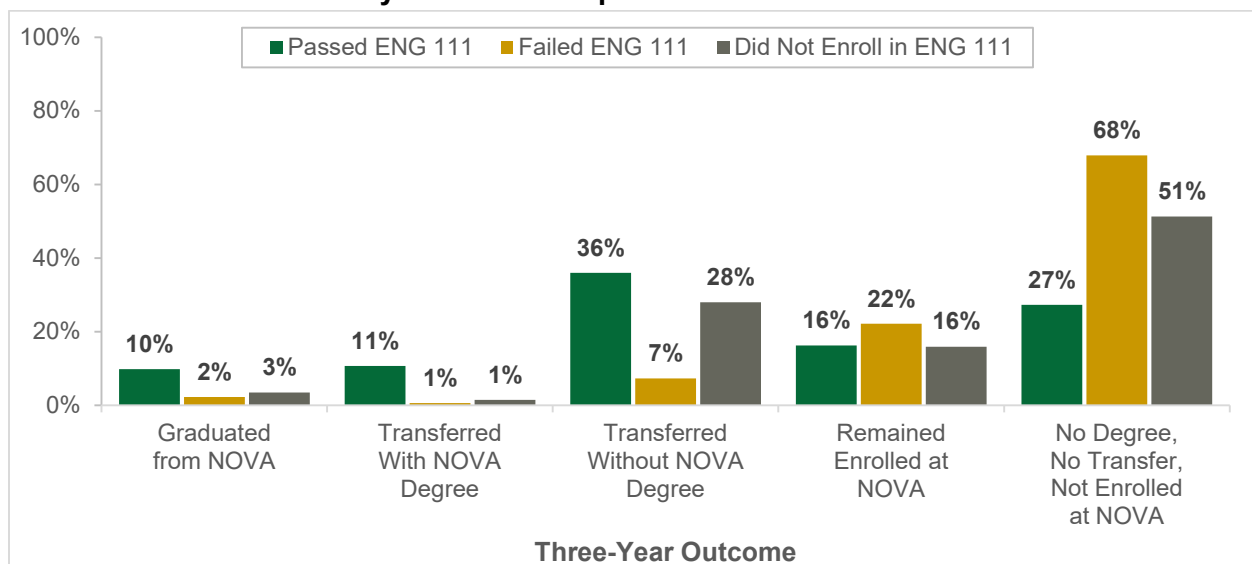
Section 2. Student Success Outcomes

This section evaluates the impact of English 111 (ENG 111) performance on student success at NOVA. Specifically, this section examines the following three-year student success outcomes: graduated, transferred to a four-year institution with a NOVA degree, transferred to a four-year institution without a NOVA degree, still enrolled at NOVA, and did not graduate/transfer to a four-year institution/remain enrolled at NOVA within three years of initial enrollment.

Three-year outcomes vary substantially based on students' performance in ENG 111. (Figure 8)

- **Graduation:** Roughly 10 percent of students who passed ENG 111 graduated from NOVA within three years, but only 2 percent of students who failed ENG 111 and 3 percent of students who did not enroll in ENG 111 graduated with a NOVA degree.
- **Transfer to Four-Year Institution:** Students who passed ENG 111 had the highest transfer rates—nearly half (47 percent) had transferred to a four-year institution (either with or without a NOVA degree) within three years of initial enrollment at NOVA. Conversely, only 8 percent of students who failed ENG 111 and 29 percent of students who did not enroll in ENG 111 transferred within three years.
- **Still Enrolled:** While 16 percent of students who passed ENG 111 were still enrolled after three years, 22 percent of students who did not pass ENG 111 were still enrolled.
- **Did not Graduate, Transfer, or Return to NOVA:** Students who did not pass ENG 111 had the lowest overall success rates: over two-thirds of these students did not graduate, did not transfer, and did not return to NOVA after three years. Conversely, only 27 percent of students who passed ENG 111 were not successful.

Figure 8. Three-Year Outcomes of First-Time in College Students by ENG 111 Completion Status: Fall 2015 Cohort



*n=11,487. See Table 8 in the Appendix for more details.

Section 3. Discussion and Conclusion

Evidence presented in this Brief suggests that the development and mastery of strong foundational writing skills can set students up for success. In the English 111 (ENG 111) course at NOVA, a primary goal is to help students develop strong critical thinking and academic writing skills. This Brief shows that students who mastered the objectives of this course (as indicated by earning a passing grade) had higher cumulative GPAs over three years, higher success rates in subsequent courses, and higher graduation and transfer rates. Moreover, students who excelled in ENG 111—particularly students who earned an ‘A’ grade—performed the strongest on average. This suggests a high mastery of course objectives can be the most beneficial to later success in college.

NOVA should consider additional strategies to provide students with the opportunity to master these foundational writing skills. Writing centers and tutoring services can provide a supplement to class time, which can aid students struggling to master ENG 111 course content. Beyond ENG 111, students would benefit from additional opportunities to use and hone their writing skills. Subsequent courses can provide this opportunity by providing more writing assignments in the curriculum. Although this puts a strain on faculty time (since writing assignments typically take longer to grade), the College can explore opportunities to outsource grading. Such a strategy would allow faculty to dedicate more time to integrating writing assignments in each course across the curriculum.

Appendix: Data Tables

**Table 1. Success Outcome in ENG 111 for First-Time
in College Students: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

ENG 111 Completion Status	Fall 2013		Fall 2014		Fall 2015	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Passed ENG 111*	4,915	50.9	6,094	57.9	6,684	58.2
Did Not Pass ENG 111**	1,695	17.6	1,902	18.1	1,885	16.4
Did Not Enroll in ENG 111	3,045	31.5	2,536	24.1	2,918	25.4
Missing Grade/Audit	2	<0.1	2	<0.1	0	0.0
Total	9,657	100.0	10,534	100.0	11,487	100.0

Note: Includes all students who enrolled in ENG 111 within the first two semesters of attending NOVA (Fall or Spring semester). If a student attempted the course in both semesters, only the Fall grade (e.g., first attempt) was considered.

*Includes all students who earned a passing grade ('A', 'B', or 'C') during their first attempt.

**Includes all students who did not earn a passing grade ('D', 'F', or 'W') during their first attempt.

Student Learning Outcomes

**Table 2. Cumulative GPA of First-Time in College Students
by ENG 111 Completion Status: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

Cumulative GPA Range	Passed ENG 111		Did Not Pass ENG 111		Did Not Enroll in ENG 111		Total Students
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Fall 2013							
<2.000	796	16.2	1,211	71.4	1,327	43.6	3,334
2.001 – 3.000	1,969	40.1	382	22.5	695	22.8	3,046
3.001 – 3.999	1,878	38.2	93	5.5	669	22.0	2,640
4.000	272	5.5	9	0.5	354	11.6	635
Total	4,915	100.0	1,695	100.0	3,045	100.0	9,655
Fall 2014*							
<2.000	967	15.9	1,373	72.2	1,051	41.4	3,391
2.001 – 3.000	2,366	38.8	396	20.8	550	21.7	3,312
3.001 – 3.999	2,078	34.1	123	6.5	545	21.5	2,746
4.000	680	11.2	10	0.5	390	15.4	1,080
Total	6,091	100.0	1,902	100.0	2,536	100.0	10,529
Fall 2015**							
<2.000	997	14.9	1,389	73.7	1,033	35.4	3,419
2.001 – 3.000	2,459	36.8	391	20.7	697	23.9	3,547
3.001 – 3.999	2,428	36.3	100	5.3	695	23.8	3,223
4.000	799	12.0	5	0.3	492	16.9	1,296
Total	6,683	100.0	1,885	100.0	2,917	100.0	11,485

*Note: GPA unavailable for three students.

**Note: GPA unavailable for two students.

Students who audited courses or had missing grades were excluded.

**Table 3. Success Rate in BIO 101 by Grade in
ENG 111: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

Grade in ENG 111	Fall 2013			Fall 2014			Fall 2015		
	Enrolled BIO 101	Success Rate		Enrolled BIO 101	Success Rate		Enrolled BIO 101	Success Rate	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
A	392	342	87.2	465	425	91.4	491	444	90.4
B	445	364	81.8	565	451	79.8	540	447	82.8
C	265	206	77.7	305	230	75.4	274	203	74.1
D	70	48	68.6	80	58	72.5	59	33	55.9
F	93	56	60.2	98	58	59.2	85	50	58.8
W	40	23	57.5	35	21	60.0	41	23	56.1
Total	1,305	1,039	79.6	1,548	1,243	80.3	1,490	1,200	80.5

**Table 4. Success Rate in BIO 102 by Grade in
ENG 111: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

Grade in ENG 111	Fall 2013			Fall 2014			Fall 2015		
	Enrolled BIO 102	Success Rate		Enrolled BIO 102	Success Rate		Enrolled BIO 102	Success Rate	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
A	357	335	93.8	419	396	94.5	412	388	94.2
B	383	346	90.3	409	348	85.1	376	334	88.8
C	192	160	83.3	186	155	83.3	164	125	76.2
D	45	34	75.6	46	39	84.8	40	28	70.0
F	45	35	77.8	43	35	81.4	32	24	75.0
W	17	14	82.4	13	11	84.6	18	15	83.3
Total	1,039	924	88.9	1,116	984	88.2	1,042	914	87.7

**Table 5. Success Rate in HIS 101 by Grade in
ENG 111: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

Grade in ENG 111	Fall 2013			Fall 2014			Fall 2015		
	Enrolled HIS 101	Success Rate		Enrolled HIS 101	Success Rate		Enrolled HIS 101	Success Rate	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
A	452	407	90.0	520	481	92.5	594	558	93.9
B	502	420	83.7	593	512	86.3	636	541	85.1
C	321	247	76.9	366	280	76.5	363	275	75.8
D	97	69	71.1	124	94	75.8	108	70	64.8
F	163	95	58.3	164	95	57.9	168	95	56.5
W	65	36	55.4	56	32	57.1	55	37	67.3
Total	1,600	1,274	79.6	1,823	1,494	82.0	1,924	1,576	81.9

**Table 6. Success Rate in HIS 102 by Grade in
ENG 111: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

Grade in ENG 111	Fall 2013			Fall 2014			Fall 2015		
	Enrolled HIS 102	Success Rate		Enrolled HIS 102	Success Rate		Enrolled HIS 102	Success Rate	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
A	254	239	94.1	312	293	93.9	296	276	93.2
B	288	259	89.9	325	283	87.1	307	276	89.9
C	147	118	80.3	172	141	82.0	144	118	81.9
D	51	36	70.6	46	32	69.6	32	27	84.4
F	59	34	57.6	62	36	58.1	50	29	58.0
W	23	12	52.2	26	18	69.2	13	11	84.6
Total	822	698	84.9	943	803	85.2	842	737	87.5

**Table 7. Success Rate in PSY 200 by Grade in
ENG 111: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts**

Grade in ENG 111	Fall 2013			Fall 2014			Fall 2015		
	Enrolled PSY 200	Success Rate		Enrolled PSY 200	Success Rate		Enrolled PSY 200	Success Rate	
		#	%		#	%		#	%
A	100	89	89.0	132	122	92.4	179	165	92.2
B	102	92	90.2	138	112	81.2	204	171	83.8
C	60	42	70.0	68	47	69.1	103	77	74.8
D	11	5	45.5	13	12	92.3	28	17	60.7
F	29	19	65.5	19	14	73.7	35	25	71.4
W	11	7	63.6	12	3	25.0	14	10	71.4
Total	313	254	81.2	382	310	81.2	563	465	82.6

Student Success Outcomes

Table 8. Three-Year Outcomes of First-Time in College Students
by ENG 111 Completion Status: Fall 2013 through Fall 2015 Cohorts

Cumulative GPA Range	Passed ENG 111		Did Not Pass ENG 111		Did Not Enroll in ENG 111		Total Students
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Fall 2013							
Graduated	641	13.0	31	1.8	144	4.7	816
Transferred with Degree	615	12.5	18	1.1	48	1.6	681
Transferred without Degree	1,189	24.2	128	7.6	502	16.5	1,819
Still Enrolled	990	20.1	394	23.2	507	16.7	1,891
No Degree, No Transfer, Not Enrolled	1,480	30.1	1,124	66.3	1,844	60.6	4,448
Total	4,915	100.0	1,695	100.0	3,045	100.0	9,655
Fall 2014							
Graduated	697	11.4	37	1.9	106	4.2	840
Transferred with Degree	674	11.1	20	1.1	49	1.9	743
Transferred without Degree	1,908	31.3	130	6.8	467	18.4	2,505
Still Enrolled	1,095	18.0	412	21.7	456	18.0	1,963
No Degree, No Transfer, Not Enrolled	1,720	28.2	1,303	68.5	1,458	57.5	4,481
Total	6,094	100.0	1,902	100.0	2,536	100.0	10,532
Fall 2015							
Graduated	654	9.8	41	2.2	100	3.4	795
Transferred with Degree	715	10.7	12	0.6	40	1.4	767
Transferred without Degree	2,405	36.0	137	7.3	816	28.0	3,358
Still Enrolled	1,083	16.2	416	22.1	464	15.9	1,963
No Degree, No Transfer, Not Enrolled	1,827	27.3	1,279	67.9	1,498	51.3	4,604
Total	6,684	100.0	1,885	100.0	2,918	100.0	11,487

1. **Graduated:** Earned a degree/certificate from NOVA within three years of initial enrollment.

2. **Transferred with Degree:** Earned a degree/certificate from NOVA *and* transferred to a four-year institution within three years.

3. **Transferred without Degree:** Transferred to a four-year institution within three years, without earning a degree/credential from NOVA.

4. **Still Enrolled:** Still enrolled at NOVA within three years.

5. **No Degree, No Transfer, Not Enrolled:** Did not graduate, did not transfer to a four-year institution, and were no longer enrolled in credit-bearing courses at NOVA within three years.