

RESEARCH BRIEF

**Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):
Tracking Progress of NOVA's Strategic Plan**

Introduction

During the 2016-17 academic year, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) engaged in a process of identifying and articulating its primary strategic priorities for the College's sixth decade of service to Northern Virginia and the Commonwealth. The result was the 2017-2023 Strategic Plan: [Pathway to the American Dream](#).¹

Consistent with the College's mission and vision, and with the goals articulated in the College's strategic plan, NOVA has an extensive and well-established history of identifying, evaluating, and publishing goals and outcomes related to student achievement. The College is committed to improving both access and success in higher education.

A core component of the new strategic plan was the identification of nine key performance indicators (KPIs) used to track student success and academic progress. The College selected these KPIs as part of the strategic planning process, with special consideration to indicators that most effectively measure important milestones in student progress and academic goal completion.

In This Brief

The goal of this document is to provide an overview of the purpose and benefit of using data dashboards. This document also summarizes the data dashboards created by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) to track the College's progress on eight of its KPIs. Links to each dashboard are included.

¹ NOVA Strategic Plan 2017-2023: Pathway to the American Dream. Northern Virginia Community College.
<https://www.nvcc.edu/about/mission/strategic-plan2017-2023.pdf>

Tracking KPIs through Data Dashboards

In order to track NOVA's progress on the key performance indicators (KPIs) described in the College's most recent strategic plan, the Office of Institution Research (OIR) developed data dashboards for eight of the nine indicators.²

What is a Data Dashboard?

A data dashboard is a collection of visual reports that display an organization's important data points, such as key performance indicators. Using a variety of graphs and tables, dashboards display both aggregated and drilled-down data in an accessible and visually appealing manner. For example, in higher education, a data dashboard may show an institution's overall retention rate, while also showing drilled-down retention rates by various subgroups of students (such as by gender or race/ethnicity). Dashboards help users quickly identify trends and patterns without a significant investment of their time or effort to make sense of complicated data.

In addition, data dashboards are interactive. Data dashboards provide users with options to analyze data on their own by selecting specifications from filtered drop-down menus. For example, users may select an option to view isolated data for a particular campus instead of all campuses, or a particular subgroup of students. This increases data usability for stakeholders by giving them the tools to see how the institution is performing in various areas of interest or concern.

The Value of Dashboards

Dashboards replace large spreadsheets and complicated reports with a more streamlined interface, which can lead to insights that are more valuable for decision-makers. To this end, there are many benefits to dashboards, including:

- Provide relevant, summarized, and up-to-date data directly to the end-user
- Provide aggregated data as well as drilled-down data by categories and/or subgroups
- Allow for data updates without having to distribute new documents or links to users
- Allow for numerous combinations of data points
- Provide timely answers to important questions asked by stakeholders
- Facilitate robust discussions at all levels of an organization
- Aid in data-driven decision-making

NOVA's KPI Dashboards

Each of the KPI dashboards provides several years of data on a given indicator in order to show trends over time. Additionally, dashboards show data by different categories (e.g., by campus) and/or various subgroups (e.g., by gender). This information helps the College to identify areas in which the College is excelling on each indicator, as well as any achievement gaps or areas for improvement.

² OIR has not created a dashboard to track the Economic Mobility Index KPI. The Fall-to-Spring and Fall-to-Fall Retention KPIs have been combined into one dashboard.

The list below describes each indicator and provides the link to the associated KPI dashboard.³

Overall Student Success Indicators

1. [Associate Degree/Certificate Completion within Three Years](#) – Number and percent of non-transfer degree students who complete an associate degree, certificate, or career studies certificate within three years of initial enrollment at NOVA
2. [Bachelor's Degree Completion within Six Years](#) – Number and percent of transfer degree students who complete a bachelor's degree within six years of initial enrollment at NOVA

Academic Progress Indicators

3. [Retention Rate of First-Time Program-Placed Students](#) – Percentage of degree-seeking students persistent in enrollment from a) the fall semester of their first year to the spring semester of their first year (fall-to-spring retention); and b) the fall semester of their first year to the fall semester of their second year (fall-to-fall retention)
4. [Gateway English and Math Completion](#) – Percentage of degree-seeking students completing a college-level math or English course within the first year of enrollment
5. [Transfer within Three Years by Number of Credits Earned](#) – Percentage of first-time transfer degree students successfully transferring to four-year institutions with more than 31 credit hours
6. [Excess Credit at Graduation](#) – Ratio of average credit hours earned at graduation to total credit hours required for graduation by degree program and major
7. [Completing Nine or More Core Credits in First Year](#) – Percentage of degree-seeking students completing at least nine semester credits in the student's field of study in the first academic year

OIR created the above dashboards to track NOVA's progress on eight of the KPIs outlined in the most recent strategic plan. However, based on frequently requested data, OIR is in the process of creating additional dashboards for other needs of the College community. Additionally, depending on the needs and interests of senior leadership and other College stakeholders, OIR will expand the creation and distribution of dashboards in the near future. Further, OIR will coach interested stakeholders on the use of these dashboards to ensure they can reap the maximum benefit from using them.

³ To access these dashboards, users should be connected to the VPN and use NVCC log-in credentials

Conclusion

NOVA regularly and systematically monitors indicators of student achievement at the institutional level. College administrators, faculty, and staff use these data to make College-wide improvements, as well as improvements in individual services and academic programs, in support of the institution's mission, vision, and strategic priorities. The KPI data dashboards serve as one way in which NOVA disseminates student achievement data to senior leadership and key frontline staff. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, NOVA plans to continue to communicate its progress on and success in each KPI area through online dashboards and virtual presentations delivered via the Zoom platform.