

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Achievement Gap Analysis Series – Successful Course Completion: Fall 2012 through Fall 2014

NOVA's commitment to student success is demonstrated by the College's participation in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) National Reform Network. ATD is a comprehensive nationwide reform movement for student success in which NOVA has been a member since 2007 and a Leader College since 2010. NOVA's participation in ATD encourages continuous monitoring of student outcomes in order to identify areas for improvement. Such attempts are based on research that leads to student success and closing the achievement gaps.

This Research Brief is part of a series examining recent trends in achievement gaps among first-time in college (FTIC) students in the following indicators of student success: course completion, retention, graduation rates, success in gatekeeper courses, success in developmental courses, and developmental student success in college-level courses.

This Research Brief examines achievement gaps in successful course completion among three cohorts of FTIC students at NOVA (Fall 2012 through Fall 2014).¹ The successful course completion rate is the measure of the number of courses successfully completed relative to the total number of courses attempted. Successful completion of a course is defined as a student earning either an A, B, C, P (Pass), or S (Satisfactory). Data is analyzed by age, gender, race/ethnicity, enrollment status (full-time or part-time), and program placement.

Key Findings

- Overall, achievement gaps in course completion rates were found when data was disaggregated by student **age, race/ethnicity, and gender**.
- No achievement gaps were found in terms of enrollment status or program placement.

Section 1. Achievement Gaps in Successful Course Completion

Table 1 shows the overall rates of successful course completion for FTIC students in the Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 cohorts. Overall, FTIC students in each cohort successfully completed about 69 percent of their courses.

**Table 1. Successful Course Completion Rates of FTIC Students:
Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 Cohorts**

Fall 2012 Cohort			Fall 2013 Cohort			Fall 2014 Cohort		
Total Enrolled	Successful		Total Enrolled	Successful		Total Enrolled	Successful	
	#	%		#	%		#	%
40,994	28,179	68.7%	41,797	28,246	67.6%	44,456	30,688	69.0%

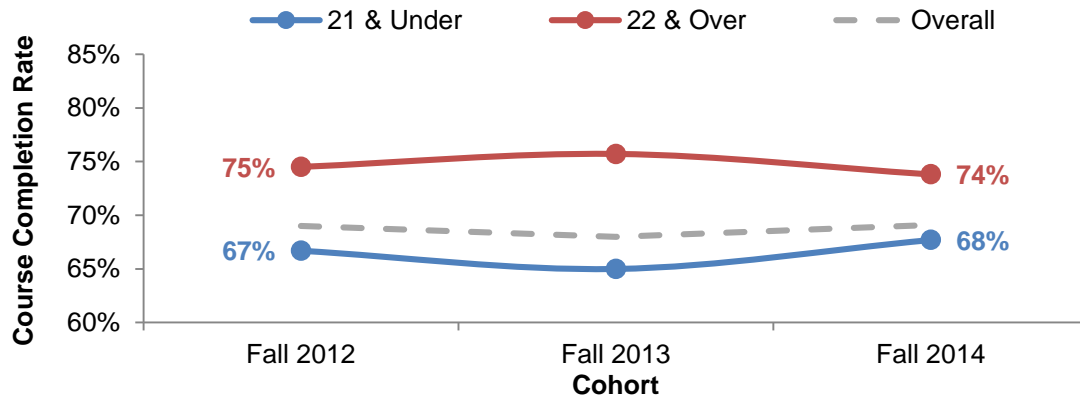
¹ OIR originally published the details of this study in "Achievement Gap Analysis Report 1 – Course Completion by Enrollment Status," available at: <http://www.nvcc.edu/oir/files/CourseCompletionReport3152016.pdf>.

Age

There was an achievement gap between younger students (ages 21 and under) and older students (ages 22 and over) in terms of course completion rates.

- On average, students ages 21 and under successfully completed around 67 percent of their courses.
- Students ages 22 and over on average had a success rate of about 75 percent.

Figure 1. Successful Course Completion Rates by Age: Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 Cohorts

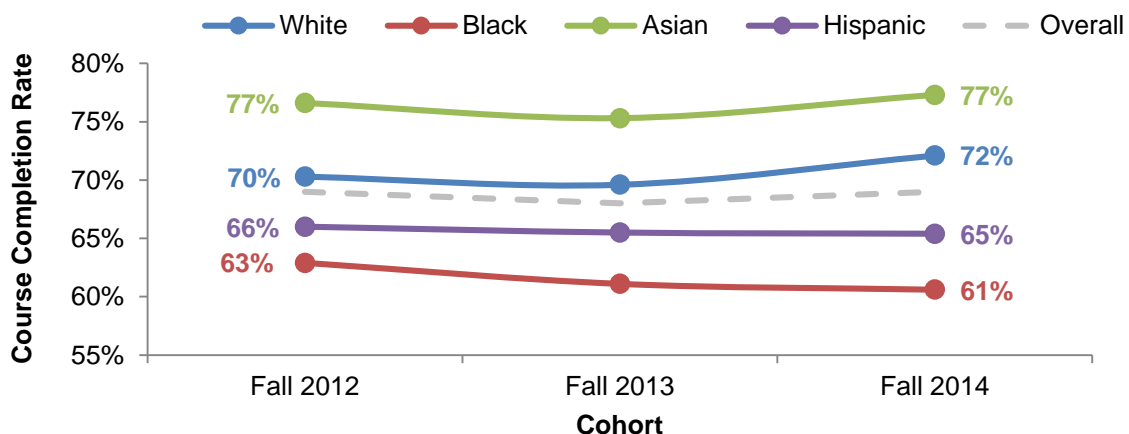


Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity emerged as an important factor for course completion in first semester among FTIC students.

- Asian students and White students had consistently higher course completion rates than Black students and Hispanic students.
- Asian students had the highest course completion rates (around 77 percent), followed by White students (about 71 percent).
- Black students and Hispanic students both had course completion rates that were between three and eight percentage points lower than the overall rate and up to 16 percentage points lower than Asian students.
- The gap between Asian and Black students increased from a 14 percentage point difference in Fall 2012 to a 16 percentage point difference in Fall 2014.

Figure 2. Successful Course Completion Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 Cohorts

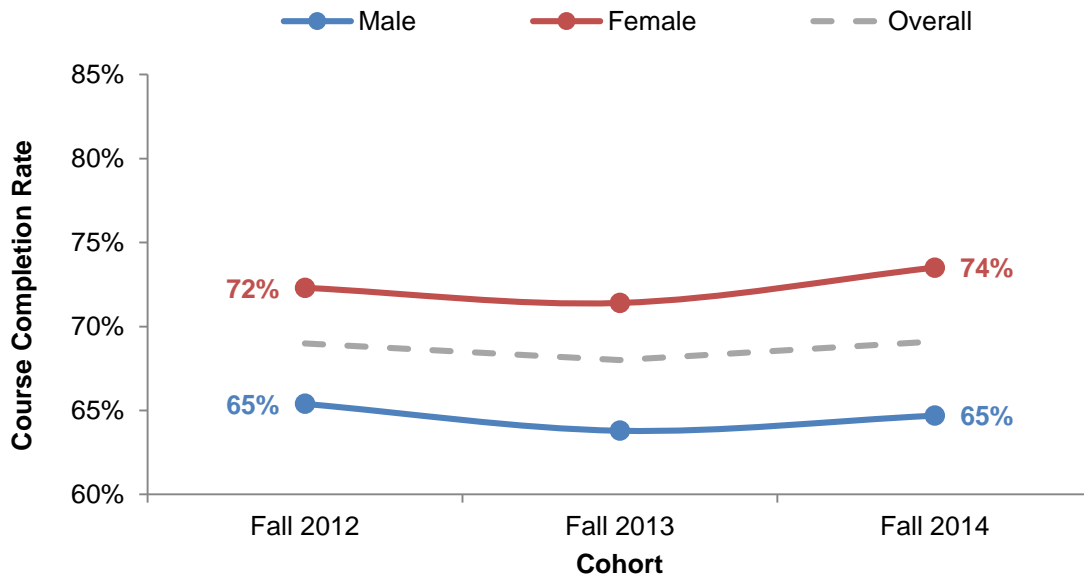


Gender

Course completion rates show an achievement gap along gender lines that increased slightly from Fall 2012 to Fall 2014.

- Female students had higher rates of successful course completion (around 72 percent) than male students (around 65 percent).
- The course completion rates of female students increased slightly (from 72 percent to 74 percent) from Fall 2012 to Fall 2014, while that of male students remained at 65 percent.

Figure 3. Successful Course Completion Rates by Gender: Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 Cohorts



Section 2. Other Findings

Enrollment Status

There was no notable difference in the course completion rates of full-time versus part-time students for all cohorts. Full-time students' successful completion remained at 69 percent, while rates for part-time students ranged from 65 to 69 percent in all cohorts.

Program Placement

Achievement gaps were not evident in terms of the degree program in which students enrolled. The majority of FTIC students were enrolled in an A.S. degree program. Course completion rates were similar (generally between 64 and 70 percent) regardless of whether students were enrolled in an A.A., A.S., A.A.A., A.A.S., or Certificate program. Students who were not enrolled in a degree or certificate program had course completion rates up to 18 percentage points higher than students who were enrolled in a degree or Certificate program.

Section 3. Discussion of Findings

Overall, the data in this Research Brief reveals a number of achievement gaps among FTIC students in terms of successful completion of courses in the first semester. Students who were male, ages 18 to 21, Black, or Hispanic were less likely than other students to successfully complete their first semester courses. Achievement gaps in successful course completion were less evident in terms of full- or part-time status or program placement.

These findings mirror national trends. Current research consistently shows that male persistence and achievement lag behind that of female students.² The gender gap is most pervasive among Black students, with Black female students earning 68 percent of all associate degrees awarded to Black students.³ In addition, national data shows that Black students and Hispanic students trail Asian students and White students on a number of student success metrics. As of 2008, only 30 percent of African Americans and 20 percent of Latinos between the ages of 25 and 34 had attained an associate degree or higher compared to 49 percent of White students and 71 percent of Asian students.⁴

Closing Achievement Gaps at NOVA

NOVA's Start Strong policy changes, launched in Fall 2014, were based on recommendations from the ATD Core Team. Such policy changes are expected to help in closing achievement gaps. For example, NOVA's orientation, advising, and Student Development course policies provide targeted interventions for FTIC students ages 17 to 24 through the GPS for Success program. The goal of GPS for Success is to help students succeed in college by fostering connections with professional advisors and faculty who help students plan for and attain their academic goals.

One of ATD's six capacity areas for student success is Equity. This capacity area is used as a framework for a faculty-led pilot on teaching and learning that promotes equitable outcomes for all students.

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) provides additional insight into how NOVA might approach closing achievement gaps. SENSE provides benchmark data in several areas that can help NOVA understand students' critical early experiences and improve policies and practices that affect student success in the first year. Results of the 2015 SENSE indicated that, relative to other community colleges nationwide, NOVA is underperforming in the "High Expectations and Aspirations," "Engaged Learning," and "Academic and Social Support Network" benchmarks. NOVA must continue to explore the implications of these benchmark scores and identify intervention strategies to help boost student success.

In addition, NOVA faculty on ATD teams are currently examining strategies to improve equity in the classroom through teaching and learning. Future research on achievement gaps at NOVA should take a comprehensive approach to data analysis by triangulating NOVA student data along with surveys, focus groups, and outside research on community college best practices for FTIC students.

² Lee, J. M., & Ransom, T. (2011). The educational experience of young men of color: A review of research, pathways, and progress. Retrieved from College Board website:

<http://youngmenofcolor.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/downloads/EEYMCResearchReport.pdf>.

³ Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). Comprehensive Fact Sheet: Men of Color in Higher Education. Retrieved from: http://www.ccsse.org/docs/MoC_Long_Fact_Sheet.pdf?ts=20170113182911.

⁴ Lee & Ransom 2011.