

RESEARCH BRIEF

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Achievement Gap Analysis Series – Four-Year Graduation Rates: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011

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 the four-year graduation rates among three cohorts of FTIC students (Fall 2009 through Fall 2011).¹ The four-year graduation rate measures the proportion of students in a particular cohort who graduated from NOVA within four years of their original enrollment. The population examined in this report only includes FTIC students who were program placed in their first semester. Data is disaggregated and analyzed by student demographics: enrollment status (full-time or part-time), age, race/ethnicity, gender, and program placement.²

Key Findings

- Overall, achievement gaps in four-year graduation rates were found when data was disaggregated by student **enrollment status, age, race/ethnicity, gender, and program placement.**
- Demographic groups with the highest graduation rates tended to be students ages 21 and under, Asian students, female students, and students enrolled in A.A. or A.S. programs as compared to their counterparts within those demographic groups.
- While the gender achievement gap decreased slightly from Fall 2009 to Fall 2011, the gap in graduation rates between Asian students and Black students increased over the same time period.

Section 1. Achievement Gaps in Four-Year Graduation Rates

Table 1 shows the four-year graduation rates of FTIC students in the Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 cohorts. Overall, about 22 percent of FTIC students graduated within four years of their initial enrollment at NOVA.

Table 1. Four-Year Graduation Rates of FTIC Students: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 Cohorts

Fall 2009 Cohort			Fall 2010 Cohort			Fall 2011 Cohort		
Total	Graduated		Total	Graduated		Total	Graduated	
	#	%		#	%		#	%
9,400	2,102	22.4%	9,514	2,039	21.4%	9,755	2,139	21.9%

¹ OIR originally published the details of this study in “Achievement Gap Analysis Report 4 – Graduation Rates by Enrollment Status,” available at: <http://www.nvcc.edu/oir/files/GraduationRatesReport.pdf>.

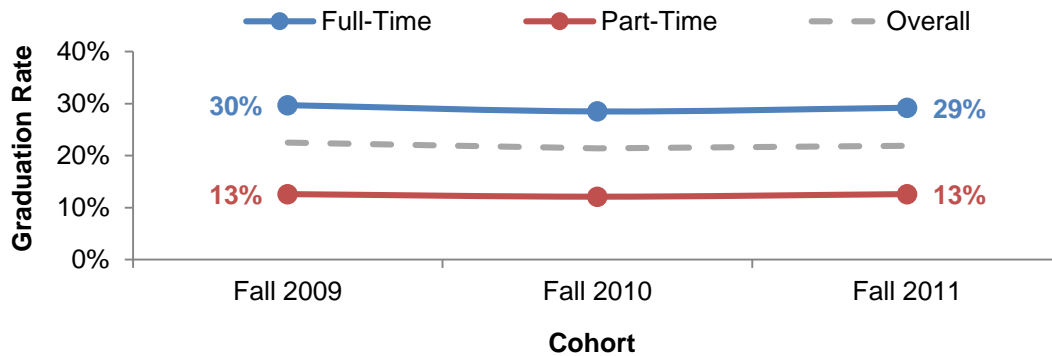
² All demographics are as of the student’s first term.

Enrollment Status

Students who attended NOVA part-time were considerably less likely to graduate within four years than students who attended full-time.

- The four-year graduation rate of full-time students was up to 17 percentage points higher than that of part-time students.
- Rates for both full- and part-time students remained relatively stable across cohorts (around 29 percent for full-time and an average of 12 percent for part-time students).

Figure 1. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Enrollment Status: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 Cohorts

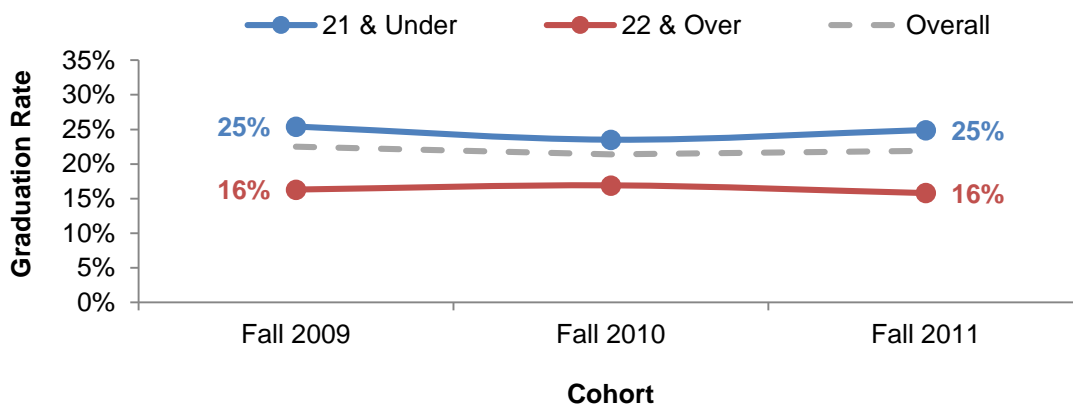


Age

The data shows a nine percentage point achievement gap between traditional college-age students (ages 21 and under) and older students (ages 22 and up).

- Roughly 25 percent of students ages 21 and under graduated within four years, compared to 16 percent of students ages 22 and up.

Figure 3. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Age: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 Cohorts



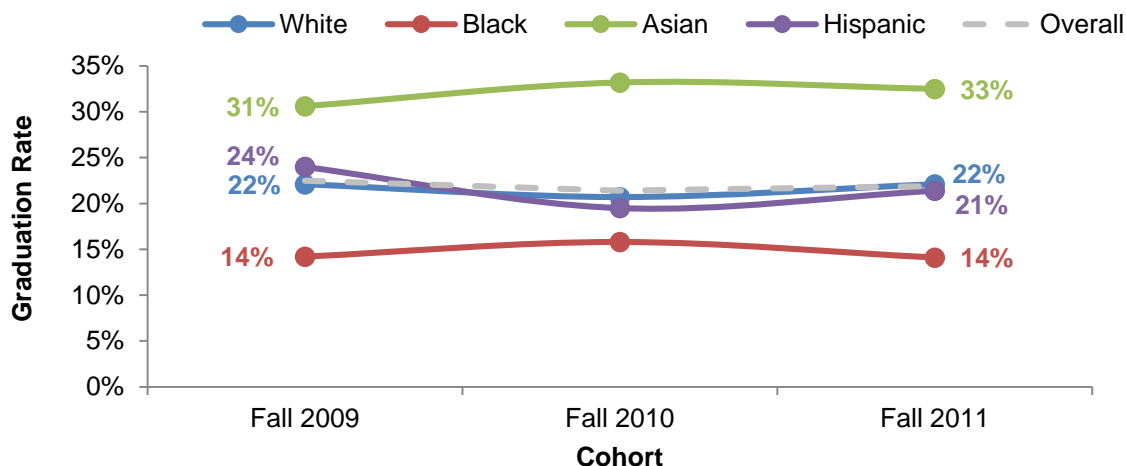
Race/Ethnicity

The data shows an achievement gap of up to 19 percentage points in the four-year graduation rates of Asian students compared to Black students.

- Asian students had the highest four-year graduation rate (about 32 percent), while Black students had the lowest (an average of 15 percent).
- White students and Hispanic students had similar four-year graduation rates (both had an average of 22 percent) that were close to the overall rate (also 22 percent).

- While the majority of students in all racial/ethnic groups were full-time, Asian students had the highest percentage of full-time students (about 68 percent attending NOVA full-time), while Black students had the lowest (about 51 percent attending full-time).³

Figure 4. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 Cohorts

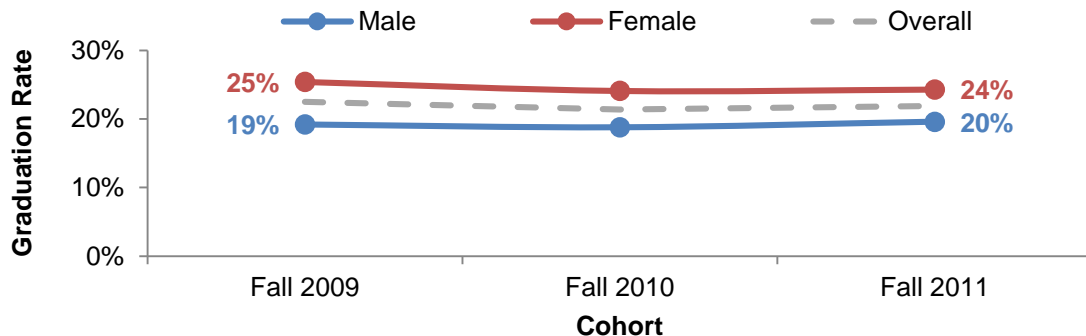


Gender

The four-year graduation rate was consistently higher for female students (about 25 percent) than male students (about 19 percent) in each cohort.

- The gender gap did narrow slightly over time, from a six-percentage point difference in Fall 2009 to a four-percentage point difference in Fall 2011, due to a slight decrease in female students' graduation rate and a slight increase in the male students' rate.

Figure 2. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Gender: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 Cohorts



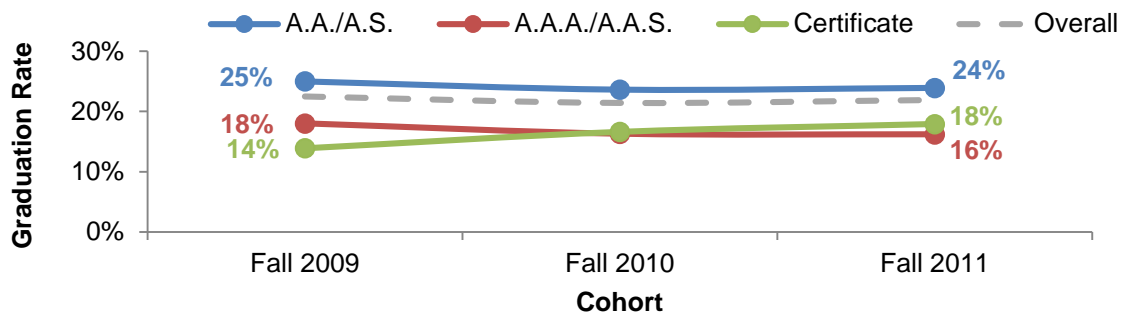
Program Placement

Roughly 70 percent of students were enrolled in A.A. or A.S. degree programs, and these students were more likely to graduate within four years than those enrolled in A.A.A., A.A.S., or Certificate programs.

- In A.A. and A.S. degree programs, about 24 percent of students graduated within four years compared to around 17 percent of students in A.A.A., A.A.S., and Certificate programs.
- Graduation rates decreased slightly from Fall 2009 to Fall 2011 for all students except those in Certificate programs, whose graduation rates increased by 4 percentage points. However, this represents a relatively small group of students: around 6 percent of each cohort were enrolled in Certificate programs.
- Students in A.A. and A.S. programs were more likely to attend NOVA full-time than students in A.A.A., A.A.S., or Certificate programs.³

³ For breakdown of demographics groups by enrollment status, see full report: "Achievement Gap Analysis Report 4 – Graduation Rates by Enrollment Status," available at: <http://www.nvcc.edu/oir/files/GraduationRatesReport.pdf>.

Figure 5. Four-Year Graduation Rates by Program Placement: Fall 2009 through Fall 2011 Cohorts



Section 2. Discussion of Findings

Overall, the data in this Research Brief reveals a number of achievement gaps among FTIC students in terms of four-year graduation rates. Students who were male, ages 22 and older, Black, Hispanic, or enrolled in A.A.A./A.A.S. or Certificate programs were less likely than other students to complete in four years.

These findings mirror national trends. Current research consistently shows that male persistence and achievement lag behind that of female students.⁴ The gender gap is most pervasive among Black students, with Black female students earning 68 percent of all associate degrees awarded to Black students.⁵ In addition, national data shows that Black and Hispanic students trail Asian 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.⁶

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.

⁴ 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>.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Lee & Ransom 2011.