OIR

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success Initiatives

NOVA
Northern Virginia Community College

RESEARCH BRIEF

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**Achievement Gap Analysis Series – Success in Developmental English:
Fall 2011 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 developmental English success rates of four cohorts of FTIC students (Fall 2011 through Fall 2014).[1] Data is disaggregated and analyzed by student demographics: enrollment status (full-time or part-time), gender, age, race/ethnicity, and program placement.[2]

Key Findings

- Overall, achievement gaps in developmental English success rates were found when data was disaggregated by student *enrollment status, gender, race/ethnicity*, and *program placement*.
- Students who were enrolled full-time, female, age 22 and older, Asian, and A.A. or A.S. program placed achieved higher success rates in developmental English courses than the rest of the respective demographic categories.

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[1] OIR originally published the details of this study in "Achievement Gap Analysis Report 6 – Success in Developmental English by Enrollment Status," available at: http://www.nvcc.edu/oir/_files/SuccessinDevelopmentalEnglish3-14-16.pdf.
[2] All demographics are as of the student's first term.

Section 1. Achievement Gaps in Developmental English Success

The success rates are presented for first-time to NOVA students, in the Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 cohorts, who enrolled in a developmental English course during their first term. Success in developmental English is defined as the rate at which students who enrolled in a developmental English course in their first term succeeded in that course within one academic year, i.e., received a grade of "S' (Satisfactory). Students who met this definition of success may not have necessarily completed their entire developmental English sequence, as students may be required to take more than one developmental English course. Students who enrolled in more than one developmental English course in their first semester were counted as successful if they succeeded in at least one of those courses.

Various structural and curricula changes were made to developmental English and were implemented between Fall 2012 and Fall 2014. A new statewide placement test was also introduced during this time period. Because of this, the analysis in this Research Brief will focus on the Fall 2012 and Fall 2013 cohorts of students who enrolled in a developmental English course and succeeded.

Table 1 shows the overall developmental English success rates of FTIC students from Fall 2011 through Fall 2014. The overall success rates for the cohort decreased from 82 percent in Fall 2011 to 75 percent in Fall 2014. However, during the period of the redesign from Fall 2012 to Fall 2014, successful completion of developmental English remained steady at 75 percent.

Table 1. Successful Developmental English Completion of FTIC Students: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts

Fall 2011 Cohort			Fall 2012 Cohort			Fall 2013 Cohort			Fall 2014 Cohort		
Total Enrolled	Successful		Total Enrolled	Successful		Total Enrolled	Successful		Total Enrolled	Successful	
	#	%		#	%		#	%		#	%
2,727	2,228	81.7%	2,865	2,144	74.8%	1,646	1,226	74.5%	1,466	1,098	74.9%

Figure 1. Successful Developmental English Completion of FTIC Students: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts
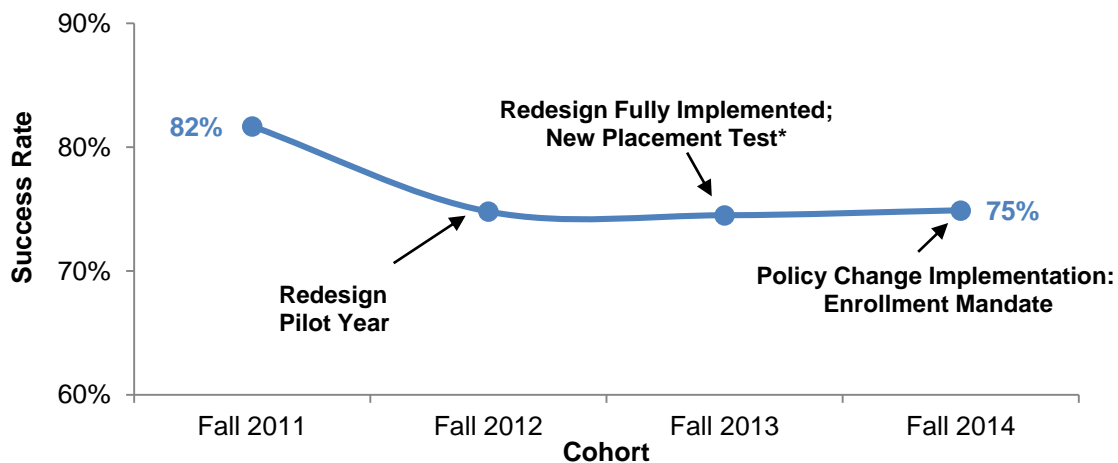

*Although the VPT-English was introduced in November 2012, the timing of the introduction meant that the Fall 2013 cohort was the first Fall cohort in which the majority of students were placed using the VPT-English.

Enrollment Status

The data shows an achievement gap in developmental English success rates of FTIC students by enrollment status.

- Developmental English success was consistently higher (by up to 14 percentage points) for full-time students than part-time students.
- Full-time students' developmental English success decreased from 78 to 77 percent from the Fall 2012 to Fall 2014 cohorts, while part-time students' developmental English success rates increased from 68 to 71 percent.
- The achievement gap decreased from 10 to 7 percentage points from the Fall 2012 to the Fall 2014 cohorts.
- Full-time students comprised two-thirds or more of students in each cohort.

Figure 2. Successful Developmental English Completion by Enrollment Status: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts
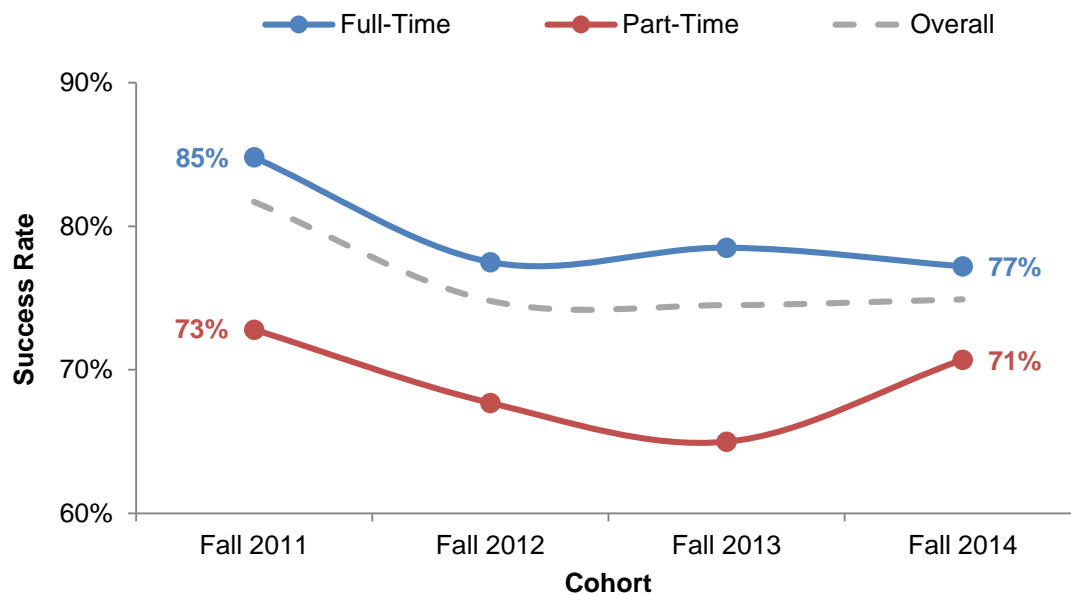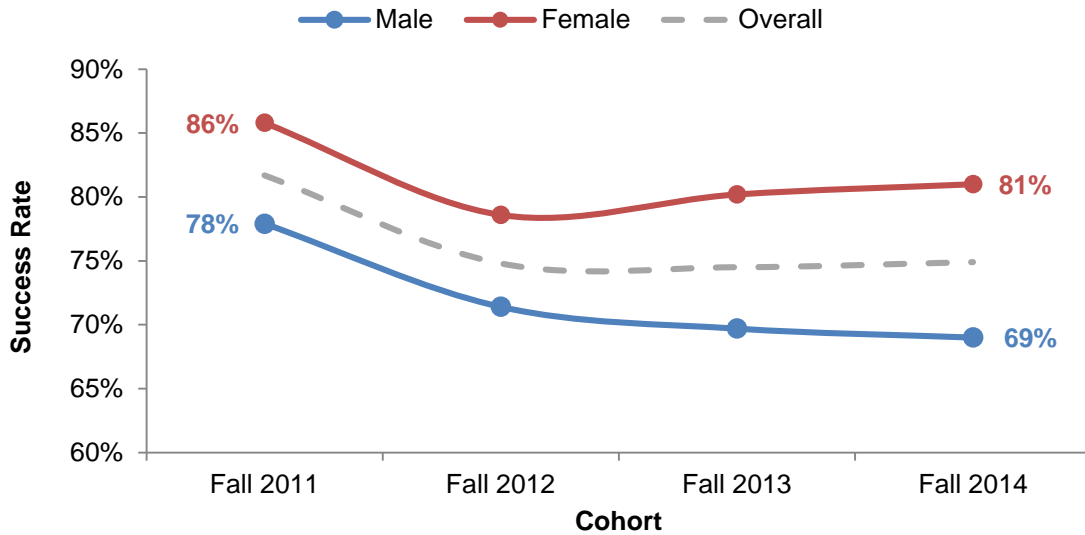

Gender

The data shows an achievement gap in developmental English success rates of FTIC students by gender.

- While male students had an achievement gap of 7 percentage points comparted to female students in the Fall 2012 cohort, this gap increased to 12 percentage points in the Fall 2014 cohort.
- Female students had a consistently higher developmental English success rate (around 80 percent) compared to male students (around 70 percent) from the Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 cohorts.

Figure 3. Successful Developmental English Completion by Gender: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts
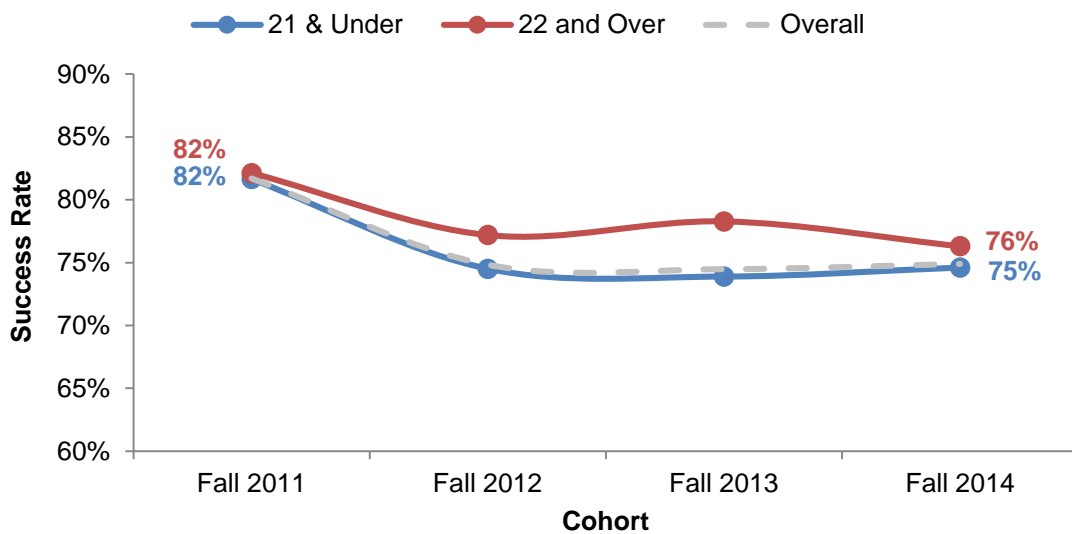

Age
The data shows a very small achievement gap in developmental English success rates of FTIC students by age.

- Students age 22 and over had slightly higher success rates in developmental English. The achievement gap between age groups decreased from 2 to 1 percentage point from Fall 2012 to Fall 2014.
- Students age 21 and under had relatively stable developmental English success rates of 75 percent from Fall 2012 through Fall 2014.
- On average, eighty-seven percent of the population comprised the 21 and under age group.

Figure 4. Successful Developmental English Completion by Age: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts
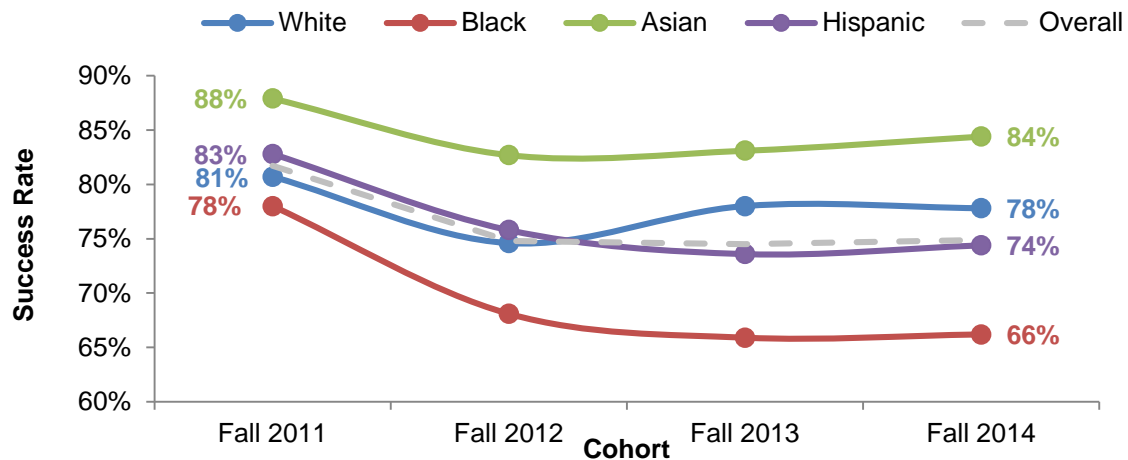
Race/Ethnicity

The data shows an achievement gap in developmental English success rates of FTIC students by race/ethnicity.

- Asian students had consistently higher developmental English success rates than White, Hispanic, and Black students.
- Asian students experienced an increase in success rates, going from 83 percent in the Fall 2012 cohort to 84 percent in the Fall 2014 cohort which increased the achievement gap compared to Black students from 15 points in the Fall 2012 cohort to 18 points in the Fall 2014 cohort.
- Asian students had the highest success rates (an average of 83 percent), followed by White students (an average of 77 percent) and Hispanic students (an average of 75 percent).
- Black students consistently had the lowest success rates (about 67 percent).

Figure 5. Successful Developmental English Completion by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts


Program Placement

The data shows an achievement gap in developmental English success is based on students' choice of degree or certificate program.

- Over seventy percent of FTIC students were enrolled in either an A.A. or A.S. degree program. Of these students, 76 percent were successful in developmental English in the Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 cohorts.
- The developmental English success rate of students in A.A.A. or A.A.S. degree programs was about 68 percent, compared to a rate of about 64 percent for students in Certificate programs in the Fall 2012 through Fall 2014 cohorts.

Figure 6. Successful Developmental English Completion by Program Placement: Fall 2011 through Fall 2014 Cohorts

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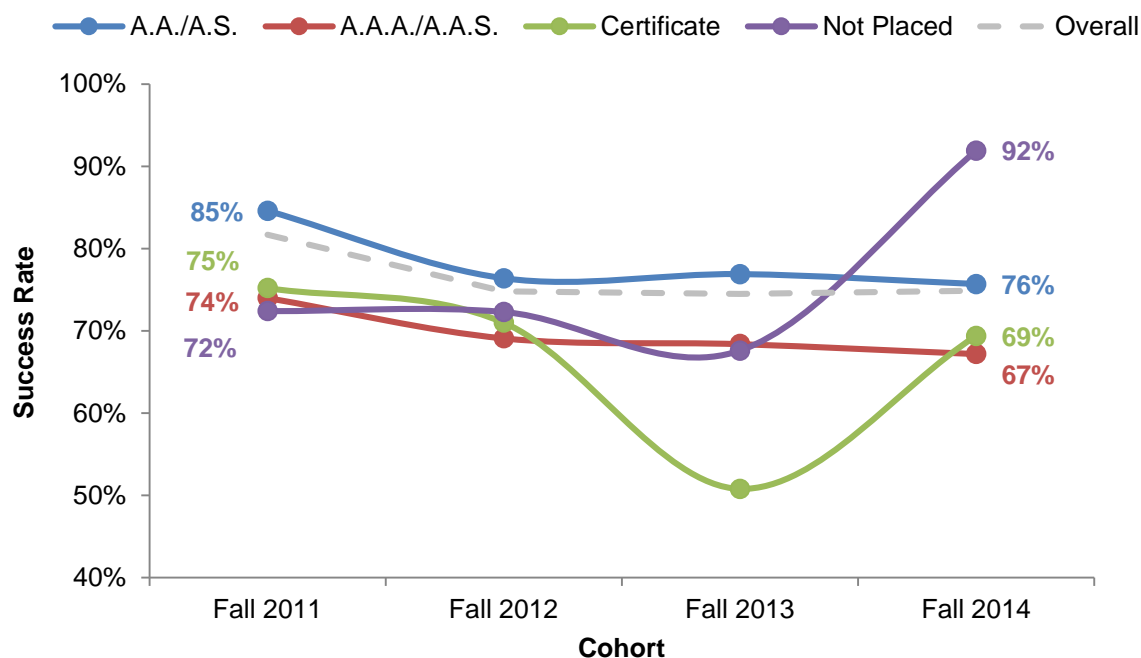
Section 2. Discussion of Findings

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 enrolled part-time, male, age 21 and under, Black, or Hispanic were less likely than other students to successfully complete their developmental English courses.

These findings mirror national trends. Current research consistently shows that male persistence and achievement lag behind that of female students.[3] The gender gap is most pervasive among Black students, with Black female students earning 68 percent of all associate degrees awarded to Black students.[4] 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.[5]

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[3] 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.

[4] 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.

[5] Lee & Ransom 2011.

Implementation of Developmental English Redesign

In order to meet the needs of the students in developmental reading and writing and to move them more effectively into college-level English courses, the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) redesigned the structure of developmental English. Two of the redesigned courses were piloted in Fall 2012 and the remaining redesigned courses were fully implemented during Spring 2013.

The developmental English redesign involved the integration of reading and writing into three fundamental courses. The redesign also involved the development of a new placement test for determining college readiness in English (VPT-English). The VPT-English is a diagnostic test for determining a student's level of preparedness in English. The scores on the VPT-English determine whether a student is ready to enroll directly into a college-level English course. VPT-English was available to all colleges in November 2012. COMPASS placement test results were used before the implementation of VPT.

Furthermore, in Fall 2014, NOVA implemented a policy change mandating placement testing and enrollment in developmental courses in their first semester, if placed; however, the policy only applied to first-time in college (FTIC) students.

These reforms are important considerations when analyzing the data and may explain the following trends:

- Between Fall 2011 and Fall 2012, there was a 5 percent increase in the number of first-time to NOVA students enrolled in developmental English in their first semester; however, between Fall 2012 and Fall 2014 there was a 49 percent decrease in enrollment in developmental English.
- Between Fall 2012 and Fall 2014, the decrease in the number of students enrolled in a developmental English course was larger for full-time students (-55 percent) than for part-time students (-34 percent).
- The overall success rate in developmental English was 82 percent in Fall 2011 but decreased by 7 percentage points to 75 percent for the Fall 2014 cohort.

Closing Achievement Gaps at NOVA

The data shows significant decline in the number of students who were placed in the developmental English since the new VPT-English was introduced. The success rate also declined since the new placement test implementation. It is possible that the old test was placing more students, including stronger students into the developmental courses.

Further studies that would track the success of developmental students versus non-developmental students would be meaningful to answer the effectiveness of VPT English Test. Although the College is able to increase the number of FTIC students completing math and English placement tests, NOVA must investigate why there is a decline in completing developmental English courses after the placement test was redesigned.

NOVA should look into these initial findings and examine the use of promising policies and practices. A good feedback on NOVA's strengths and weaknesses is captured by the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE). SENSE provides the benchmark data in several areas. These data can help NOVA understand students' critical early experiences and improve policies and practices that affect student success in the first college year.

Results of the SENSE 2015 indicated NOVA is underperforming in the "High Expectations and Aspirations", "Engaged Learning" and "Academic and Social Support Network". NOVA must explore further the concerned benchmarks and identify intervention strategies to help boost student success. The study also recommends reviewing the best practices implemented by other community colleges that are successful in improving developmental English.

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 was used as a framework for a faculty-led pilot on teaching and learning that promotes equitable outcomes for all students.

NOVA has many initiatives in place to narrow the achievement gap by demographics. While NOVA's greatest strength is diversity of student body, it poses challenge as well. Meeting the needs of low income, students of color, and other underserved populations may require different approaches and the College is striving hard to understand and respond to the needs of diverse populations.