

RESEARCH BRIEF

Why Do Students Leave NOVA?

Introduction

In Fall 2018, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) surveyed a population of recent non-returning students in order to gather information regarding the reasons for their departure and their plans to return to college. The survey population included students who last enrolled at NOVA within the last six years, but were not enrolled in Fall 2018, did not graduate from NOVA, and at the time of the survey administration, had not transferred nor attained a four-year degree subsequent to their enrollment at NOVA. A total of 1,101 non-returning students responded to the survey.

In This Brief

This Brief examines the reasons why non-returning students chose to leave, and their plans to return to NOVA or another post-secondary institution in the future. The appendix section disaggregates results across select student characteristics (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity¹).

Key Findings

- Non-returning students who did not achieve their goals while at NOVA indicated discontinuing their enrollment due to **personal (41%), financial (38%), institutional (20%), and academic (16%) reasons²**.
 - The most common **personal reasons** that prevented re-enrollment were:
1) *family responsibilities*; 2) *busy work schedules*; and 3) *health issues*.
 - The most common **financial reasons** that prevented re-enrollment were:
1) *not able to afford tuition*; 2) *issues attaining financial aid*; and 3) *unexpected financial obligations*.
 - The most common **institutional reasons** that prevented re-enrollment were:
1) *college policies that prevented registration*; and 2) *dissatisfied with the facilities*.
 - The most common **academic reasons** that prevented re-enrollment were dissatisfaction with:
1) *academic performance*; 2) *instructors*; and 3) *academic advising and counseling*.
- Approximately 40 percent of respondents indicated plans to return to NOVA in the future.

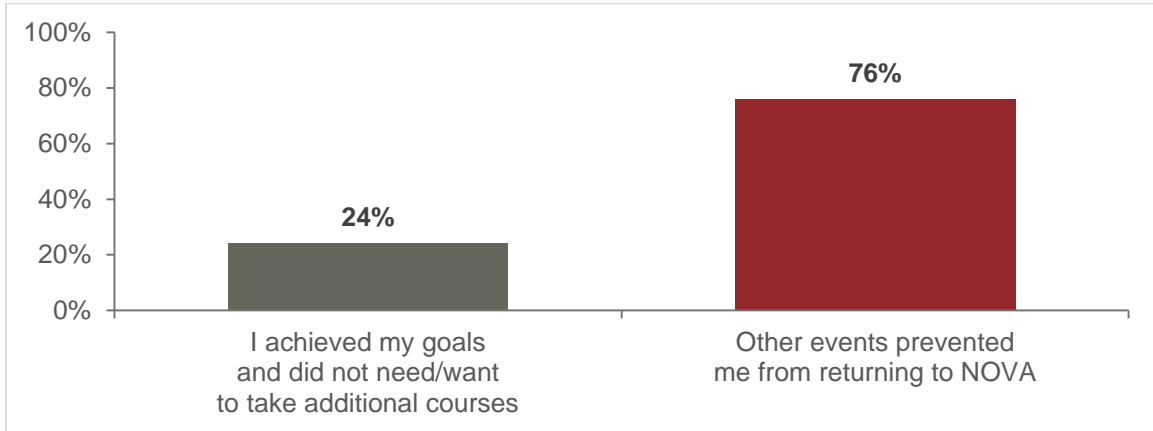
¹ Analyses by race/ethnicity include only white, black, Asian, and Hispanic respondents due to small sample sizes in other groups.

² Reasons are not mutually exclusive and may not sum to 100 percent.

Overall Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Non-returning students were asked about their reason for leaving NOVA. About a quarter of respondents (24 percent) indicated that they achieved their goals while at NOVA and did not need or want to take additional courses. The majority, however, indicated there were other reasons and/or events that prevented their return to NOVA. (Figure 1)

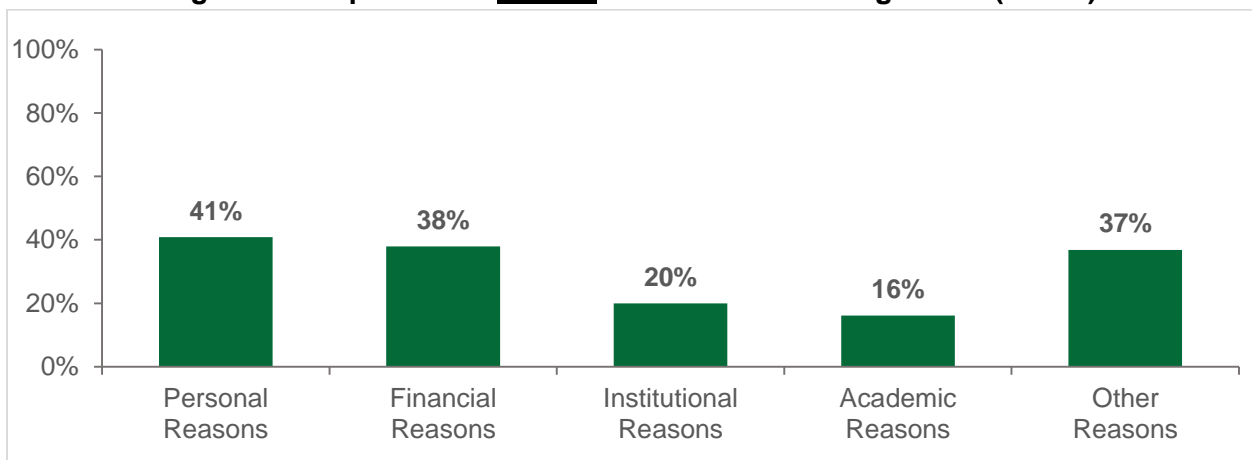
Figure 1. Respondents' Reason for Leaving NOVA (n=1,019)



Respondents who indicated that there were reasons and/or events that prevented their return to NOVA (see Figure 1) were asked whether these reasons/events were personal, financial, institutional, academic, or other. These reasons were not mutually exclusive and respondents could select more than one reason.

A plurality of students indicated that they chose not to return because of *personal* or *financial* reasons (41 and 38 percent, respectively). A substantial number of students also indicated *other* reasons—e.g., those other than personal, financial, institutional, or academic—prevented their return. *Other* reasons included leaving to pursue other opportunities or taking a break from coursework. (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Respondents' Overall Reasons for Leaving NOVA (n=794)

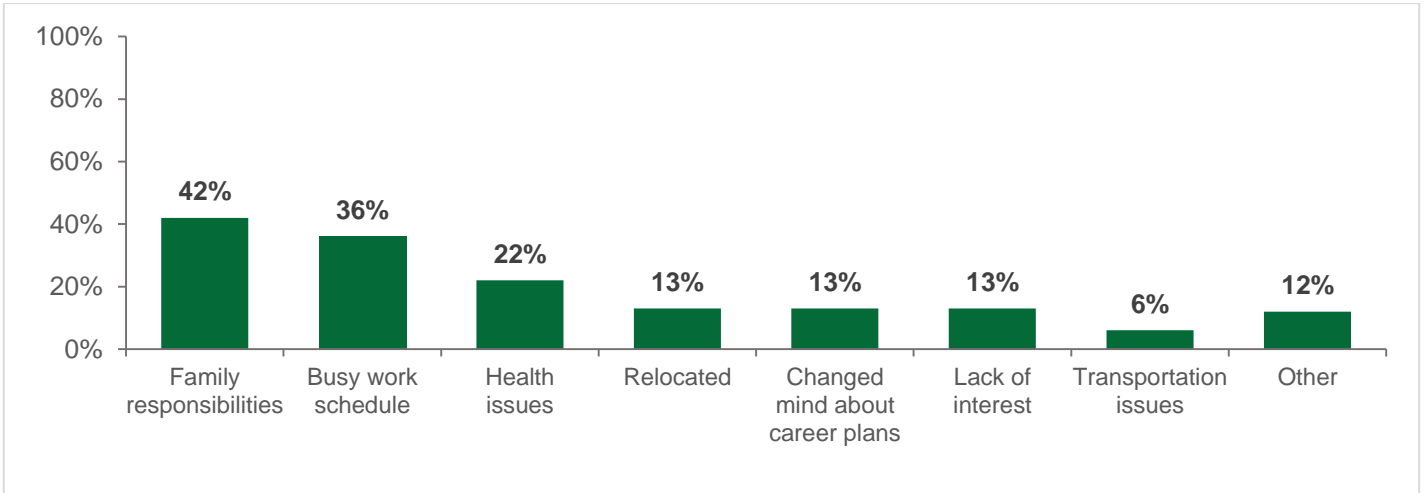


Note: Response options are not mutually exclusive and may not sum to 100 percent.

Personal Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Respondents who indicated that they left NOVA due to personal reasons were asked what specific personal reasons prevented them from returning. The most frequently selected personal reasons were *family responsibilities* (42 percent), *busy work schedule* (36 percent), and *health issues* (22 percent). (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Respondents' Personal Reasons for Leaving NOVA (n=323)

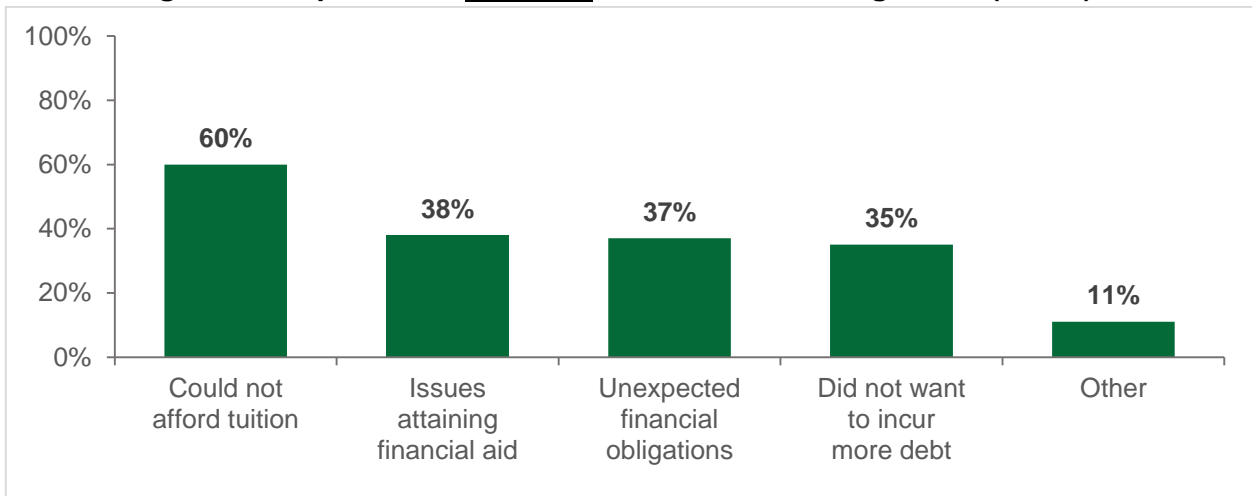


Note: Response options are not mutually exclusive and may not sum to 100 percent.

Financial Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Respondents who indicated that they left NOVA due to financial reasons were asked what specific financial reasons prevented them from returning. Among these respondents, more than half (60 percent) specified that they *could not afford tuition*. (Figure 4)

Figure 4. Respondents' Financial Reasons for Leaving NOVA (n=302)

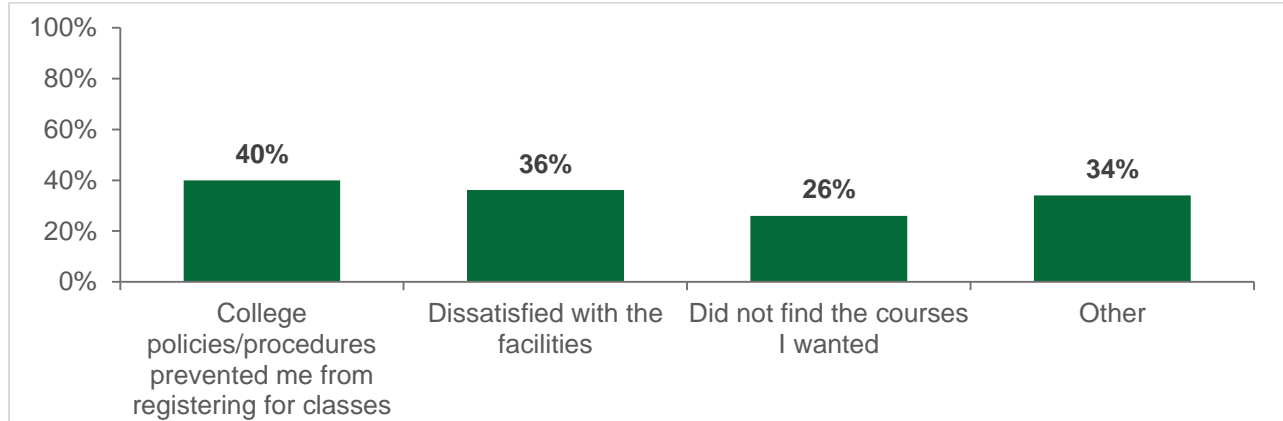


Note: Response options are not mutually exclusive and may not sum to 100 percent.

Institutional Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Respondents who indicated that they left NOVA due to institutional reasons were asked what specific institutional reasons prevented them from returning. A plurality of students said the reason they did not return was because they were *dissatisfied with the facilities* (e.g., overcrowded parking lots) or *college policies and/or procedures prevented their registration for classes* (36 and 40 percent, respectively). About one-third of respondents (34 percent) indicated there were institutional reasons other than those listed, such as finding the institution to not be military friendly or they were waiting for specific classes to be offered. (Figure 5)

Figure 5. Respondents' Institutional Reasons for Leaving NOVA (n=152)

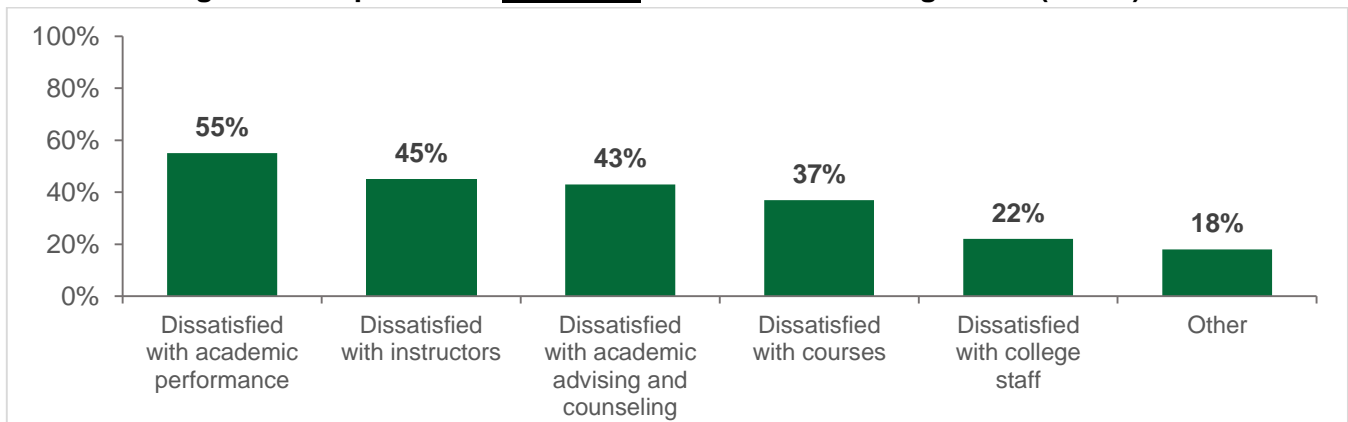


Note: Response options are not mutually exclusive and may not sum to 100 percent.

Academic Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Respondents who indicated that they left NOVA due to academic reasons were asked what specific academic reasons prevented them from returning. The most frequently selected academic reasons were *dissatisfaction with their own academic performance* (55 percent), *dissatisfaction with instructors* (45 percent), and *dissatisfaction with academic advising and counseling* (43 percent). (Figure 6)

Figure 6. Respondents' Academic Reasons for Leaving NOVA (n=126)



Note: Response options are not mutually exclusive and may not sum to 100 percent.

Plans to Return to NOVA or Enroll at Another Institution

Respondents were asked whether or not they planned to return to NOVA in the future. Respondents were also asked whether or not they planned to enroll at another post-secondary institution (other than NOVA) in the future. While roughly 42 percent of respondents indicated they definitely or probably plan to return to NOVA in the future (Figure 7), over half indicated they would definitely or probably attend another post-secondary institution other than NOVA to continue their education (Figure 8).³

Figure 7. Respondents' Plans for Returning to NOVA in the Future (n=1,042)

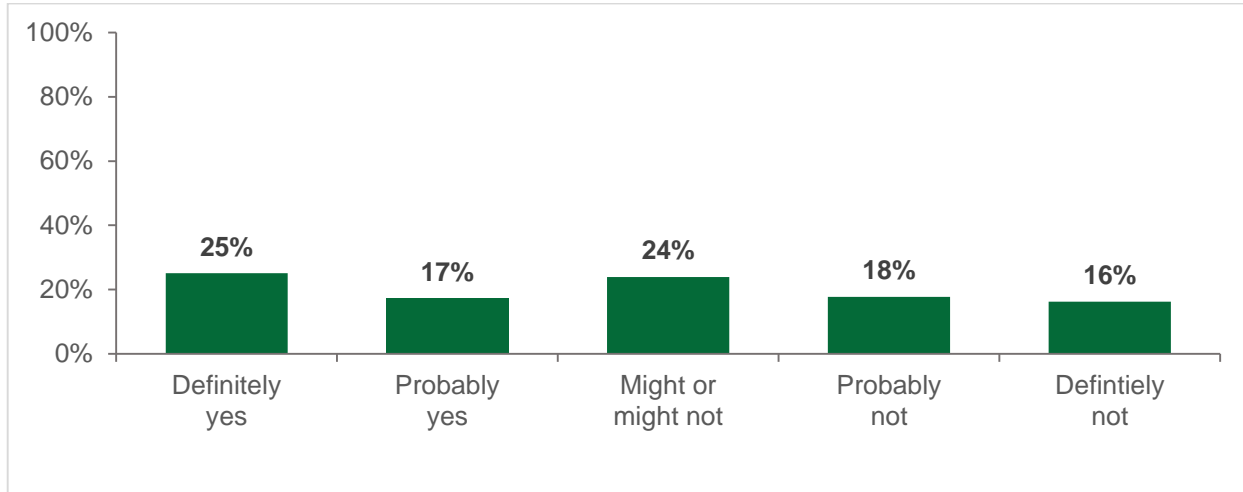
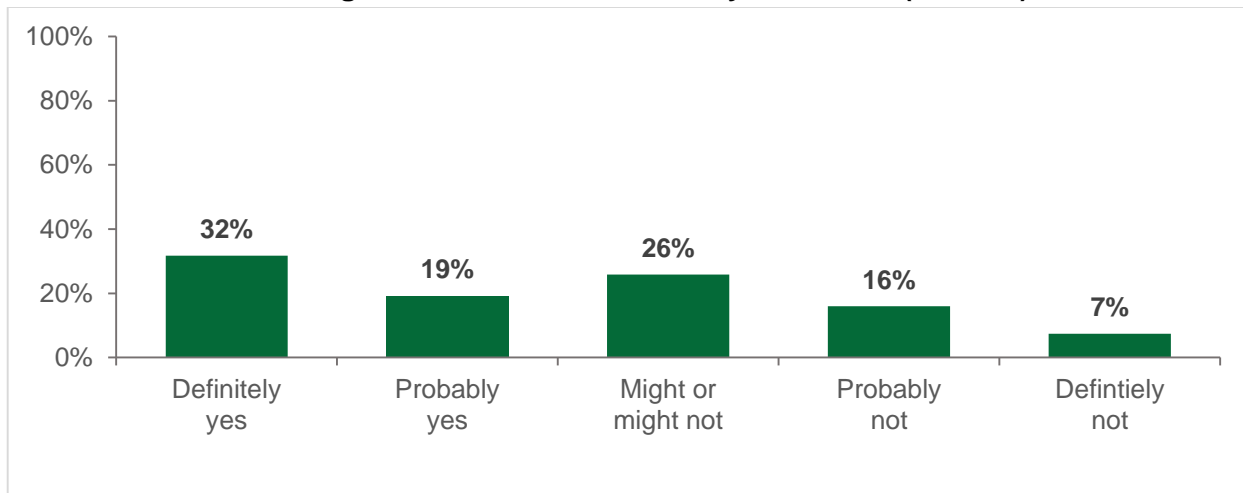


Figure 8. Respondents' Plans for Enrolling at Another Post-Secondary Institution (n=1,032)



³ Respondents answered both questions independently. Therefore, students could indicate plans to return to NOVA as well as plans to enroll at another post-secondary institution in the future. Approximately 22 percent of students who answered both questions indicated they probably or definitely would enroll at both NOVA and another institution in the future.

Data Tables

Table A1. Respondents' Overall Reason for Leaving NOVA

Student Characteristics		n	Personal Reasons		Financial Reasons		Institutional Reasons		Academic Reasons		Other Reasons	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	485	203	41.9	190	39.2	93	19.2	73	15.1	167	34.4
	Male	309	121	39.2	112	36.2	65	21.0	55	17.8	125	40.5
Race/ Ethnicity	White	335	127	37.9	101	30.1	88	26.3	57	17.0	143	42.7
	Black	178	74	41.6	86	48.3	26	14.6	26	14.6	56	31.5
	Asian	63	25	39.7	28	44.4	7	11.1	11	17.5	16	25.4
	Hispanic	159	73	45.9	67	42.1	25	15.7	21	13.2	48	30.2
First Gen. Status	First Generation	196	76	38.8	74	37.8	32	16.3	22	11.2	71	36.2
	Continuing Generation	598	248	41.5	228	38.1	126	21.1	106	17.7	221	37.0
Last Award Sought	Transfer Degree	547	227	41.5	218	39.9	116	21.2	103	18.8	203	37.1
	Occ./Tech. Degree	178	72	40.4	64	36.0	31	17.4	19	10.7	66	37.1
	Certificate	69	25	36.2	20	29.0	11	15.9	6	8.7	23	33.3
All Respondents		794	324	40.8	302	38.0	158	19.9	128	16.1	292	36.8

Note: One or more respondents may have answered the overall reason but not the specific reasons for leaving. Therefore, the number of respondents in table A1 may be more than the number of respondents in tables A2 – A5 which indicate specific reasons for leaving.

Table A2. Respondents' Personal Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Student Characteristics		n	Family responsibility		Busy work schedule		Health issues		Relocated		Changed mind about career plans		Lack of interest		Transportation issues		Other personal reasons	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	202	91	45.0	61	30.2	46	22.8	27	13.4	23	11.4	27	13.4	12	5.9	26	12.9
	Male	121	46	38.0	56	46.3	24	19.8	15	12.4	18	14.9	14	11.6	8	6.6	14	11.6
Race/ Ethnicity	White	126	44	34.9	44	34.9	35	27.8	21	16.7	19	15.1	14	11.1	6	4.8	10	7.9
	Black	74	29	39.2	30	40.5	13	17.6	13	17.6	7	9.5	8	10.8	7	9.5	11	14.9
	Asian	25	14	56.0	5	20.0	5	20.0	0	0.0	3	12.0	3	12.0	1	4.0	2	8.0
	Hispanic	73	37	50.7	27	37.0	11	15.1	5	6.8	12	16.4	14	19.2	4	5.5	13	17.8
First Gen. Status	First Generation	76	39	51.3	30	39.5	16	21.1	11	14.5	5	6.6	8	10.5	1	1.3	10	13.2
	Continuing Generation	247	98	39.7	87	35.2	54	21.9	31	12.6	36	14.6	33	13.4	19	7.7	30	12.2
Last Award Sought	Transfer Degree	227	103	45.4	81	35.7	58	25.6	24	10.6	24	10.6	30	13.2	15	6.6	30	13.2
	Occ./Tech. Degree	72	26	36.1	25	34.7	10	13.9	13	18.1	14	19.4	7	9.7	4	5.6	7	9.7
	Certificate	24	8	33.3	11	45.8	2	8.3	5	20.8	3	12.5	4	16.7	1	4.2	3	12.5
All Respondents		323	137	42.4	117	36.2	70	21.7	42	13.0	41	12.7	41	12.7	20	6.2	40	12.4

Table A3. Respondents' Financial Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Student Characteristics		n	Could not afford tuition		Issues attaining financial aid		Unexpected financial obligations		Did not want to incur more debt		Other financial reasons	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	190	124	65.3	78	41.1	64	33.7	63	33.2	22	11.6
	Male	112	57	50.9	36	32.1	48	42.9	43	38.4	11	9.8
Race/ Ethnicity	White	101	59	58.4	32	31.7	38	37.6	41	40.6	15	14.9
	Black	86	50	58.1	35	40.7	34	39.5	22	25.6	9	10.5
	Asian	28	19	67.9	5	17.9	7	25.0	8	28.6	2	7.1
	Hispanic	67	41	61.2	32	47.8	28	41.8	27	40.3	3	4.5
First Gen. Status	First Generation	74	41	55.4	29	39.2	30	40.5	30	40.5	7	9.5
	Continuing Generation	228	140	61.4	85	37.3	82	36.0	76	33.3	26	11.4
Last Award Sought	Transfer Degree	218	133	61.0	87	39.9	81	37.2	77	35.3	24	11.0
	Occ./Tech. Degree	64	40	62.5	23	35.9	22	34.4	22	34.4	8	12.5
	Certificate	20	8	40.0	4	20.0	9	45.0	7	35.0	1	5.0
All Respondents		302	181	59.9	114	37.7	112	37.1	106	35.1	33	10.9

Table A4. Respondents' Institutional Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Student Characteristics		n	College procedures/policies prevented me from registering for classes		Dissatisfied with the facilities		Did not find the courses I wanted		Other institutional reasons	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	89	38	42.7	31	34.8	24	27.0	28	31.5
	Male	63	23	36.5	24	38.1	16	25.4	23	36.5
Race/ Ethnicity	White	86	30	34.9	35	40.7	18	20.9	30	34.9
	Black	25	9	36.0	6	24.0	10	40.0	8	32.0
	Asian	6	2	33.3	3	50.0	2	33.3	1	16.7
	Hispanic	23	12	52.2	7	30.4	8	34.8	7	30.4
First Gen. Status	First Generation	31	15	48.4	10	32.3	5	16.1	10	32.3
	Continuing Generation	121	46	38.0	45	37.2	35	28.9	41	33.9
Last Award Sought	Transfer Degree	111	51	45.9	42	37.8	26	23.4	35	31.5
	Occ./Tech. Degree	30	8	26.7	10	33.3	9	30.0	13	43.3
	Certificate	11	2	18.2	3	27.3	5	45.5	3	27.3
All Respondents		152	61	40.1	55	36.2	40	26.3	51	33.6

Table A5. Respondents' Academic Reasons for Leaving NOVA

Student Characteristics		n	Dissatisfied with academic performance		Dissatisfied with instructors		Dissatisfied with academic advising and counseling		Dissatisfied with courses		Dissatisfied with college staff		Other academic reasons	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	71	37	52.1	30	42.3	37	52.1	28	39.4	19	26.8	12	16.9
	Male	55	32	58.2	27	49.1	17	30.9	19	34.5	9	16.4	10	18.2
Race/Ethnicity	White	56	31	55.4	28	50.0	25	44.6	24	42.9	15	26.8	11	19.6
	Black	26	11	42.3	10	38.5	11	42.3	6	23.1	4	15.4	6	23.1
	Asian	11	5	45.5	7	63.6	1	9.1	4	36.4	1	9.1	1	9.1
	Hispanic	20	13	65.0	8	40.0	11	55.0	8	40.0	4	20.0	1	5.0
First Gen. Status	First Generation	22	9	40.9	12	54.6	9	40.9	10	45.5	5	22.7	4	18.2
	Continuing Generation	104	60	57.7	45	43.3	45	43.3	37	35.6	23	22.1	18	17.3
Last Award Sought	Transfer Degree	102	60	58.8	47	46.1	47	46.1	36	35.3	25	24.5	20	19.6
	Occ./Tech. Degree	18	8	44.4	6	33.3	6	33.3	7	38.9	3	16.7	2	11.1
	Certificate	6	1	16.7	4	66.7	1	16.7	4	66.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
All Respondents		126	69	54.8	57	45.2	54	42.9	47	37.3	28	22.2	22	17.5

Table A6. Respondents' Plans to Return to NOVA or Enroll at Another Post-Secondary Institution

Student Characteristics		Do you plan to return to NOVA?										Do you plan to enroll at another post-secondary institution?									
		Definitely not		Probably not		Might or might not		Probably yes		Definitely yes		Definitely not		Probably not		Might or might not		Probably yes		Definitely yes	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Gender	Female	92	15.0	83	13.5	166	27.1	111	18.1	161	26.3	37	6.1	98	16.2	167	27.6	117	19.3	186	30.7
	Male	77	17.9	101	23.5	83	19.3	67	15.6	101	23.5	39	9.1	67	15.7	99	23.2	81	19.0	141	33.0
Race/Ethnicity	White	110	23.0	112	23.4	121	25.3	72	15.1	63	13.2	43	9.1	87	18.5	130	27.6	76	16.1	135	28.7
	Black	17	8.0	25	11.8	46	21.7	34	16.0	90	42.5	8	3.8	26	12.2	42	19.7	46	21.6	91	42.7
	Asian	10	10.0	12	12.0	26	26.0	17	17.0	35	35.0	8	8.2	9	9.2	27	27.6	20	20.4	34	34.7
	Hispanic	20	11.0	23	12.6	40	22.0	41	22.5	58	31.9	12	6.6	34	18.8	49	27.1	38	21.0	48	26.5
First Gen. Status	First Generation	35	14.5	36	14.9	49	20.2	40	16.5	82	33.9	23	9.5	39	16.2	56	23.2	46	19.1	77	32.0
	Cont. Generation	134	16.8	148	18.5	200	25.0	138	17.3	180	22.5	53	6.7	126	15.9	210	26.5	152	19.2	250	31.6
Last Award Sought	Transfer Degree	128	17.7	128	17.7	166	22.9	119	16.4	183	25.3	49	6.8	89	12.4	176	24.6	140	19.6	262	36.6
	Occ./Tech.	32	14.8	32	14.8	52	24.1	42	19.4	58	26.9	14	6.5	46	21.4	59	27.4	43	20.0	53	24.7
	Certificate	9	8.8	24	23.5	31	30.4	17	16.7	21	20.6	13	12.9	30	29.7	31	30.7	15	14.9	12	11.9
All Respondents		169	16.2	184	17.7	249	23.9	178	17.1	262	25.1	76	7.4	165	16.0	266	25.8	198	19.2	327	31.7