

RESEARCH BRIEF

**Success Outcomes of Part-Time
Students at NOVA: Fall 2014 Cohort**

Introduction

Part-time students often fall within a blind spot of college administrators, federal reporting, and research, which typically focus on the academic outcomes of traditional, full-time students. As a result, not much is known about the long-term outcomes of part-time students, but the information that does exist paints a dire picture. Recent research from the National Student Clearinghouse found that while 80 percent of full-time students completed a degree or certificate within six years of initial enrollment, only 20 percent of part-time students reached the same milestone.¹ Although it will take a part-time student longer to accumulate enough credits to graduate, it is alarming that as few as one-in-five will reach graduation over a six-year period.

In This Brief

Building on current literature, this Brief examines the enrollment patterns of part-time students at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) and evaluates how enrollment intensity is related to student success. More detailed analysis regarding this topic can be found in OIR Report 50-18.

Summary of Findings

This Brief shows that the majority of NOVA students will enroll part-time at least once during college, meaning this group will drive the overall success rates of the College.

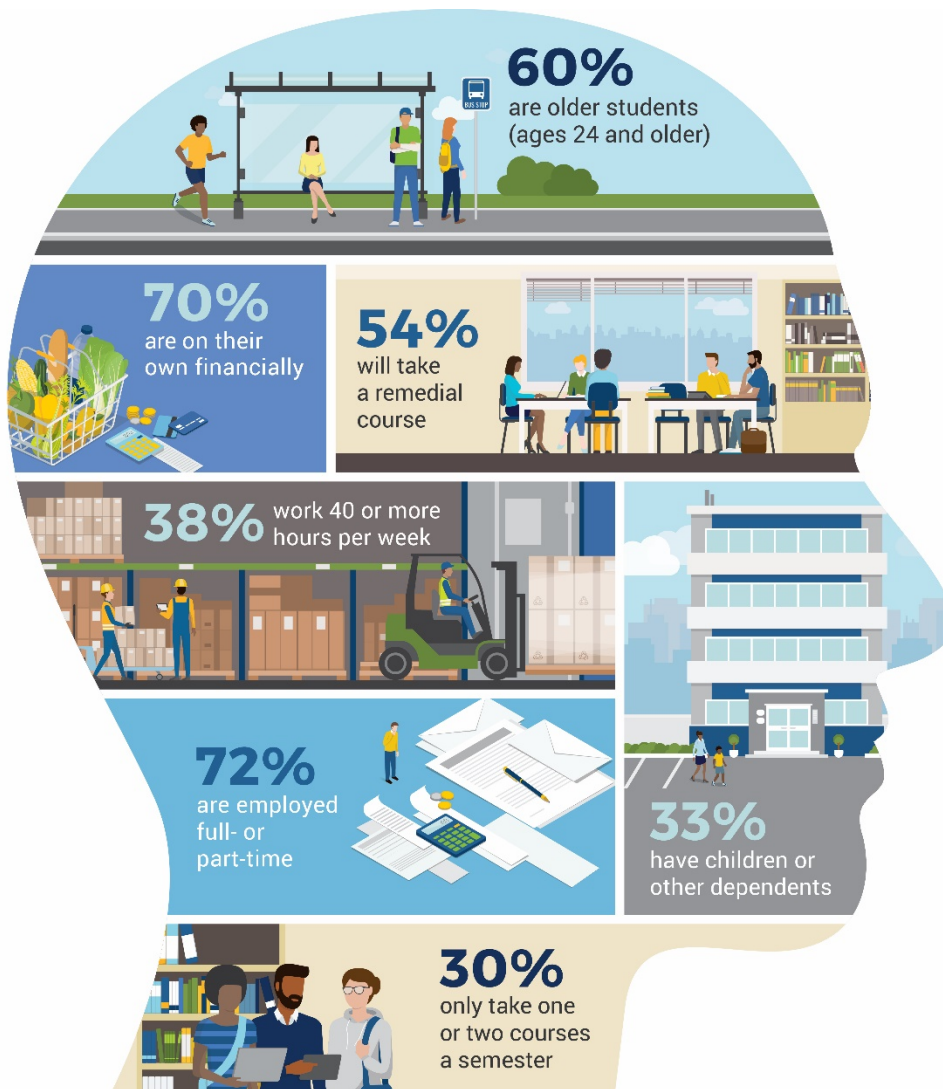
- Students who attended half or more of their semesters part-time had a higher proportion of credits that were attempted but not earned (unproductive credits).
- Only 13 percent of students who attended every semester part-time had graduated and/or transferred within four years, but between 50 and 69 percent of students who attended always or mostly full-time had achieved this academic goal.
- A sizable proportion of part-time students were still enrolled at the college after four years, suggesting the four-year period was not sufficient time to complete a degree, but many of these students are still pursuing this goal.

¹ Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A., & Bhimdiwala, A. (2018). *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Completion Rates (Signature Report No. 14A)*. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Why Do Students Attend Part-Time?

Historically, researchers and administrators have suggested that the best way to improve success outcomes of part-time students is to encourage them to enroll in more credits, or even make the transition to full-time enrollment. While this may be possible for some students, not every student will have the ability or opportunity to enroll full-time. Many students attend part-time out of necessity; these students are often working long hours, caring for dependents, and struggling to finance their college education on their own. Figure 1, below, shows the average characteristics of part-time students enrolled at two-year colleges across the nation.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Part-Time Students Enrolled at Two-Year Colleges in the United States



Source: U.S. Department of Education²

² (2018). 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

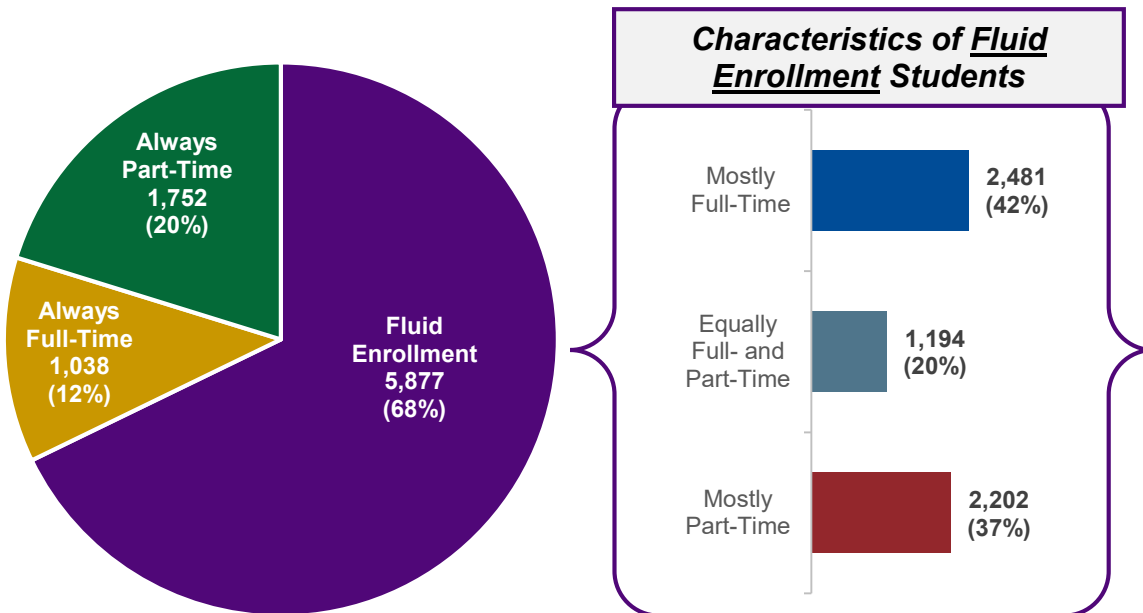
NOVA Student Enrollment Patterns

Recent research notes that a binary classification of enrollment status based on a student’s first semester (e.g., part-time versus full-time) can underestimate the total number of students who enroll part-time *at least once* during college. Therefore, this section explores the multi-year enrollment intensity patterns of a single NOVA cohort: the Fall 2014 first-time to NOVA, program-placed (FTTN/PP) cohort.³

Figure 2, below, shows that a majority of NOVA students—over two-thirds—will enroll part-time at least once. Within this **Fluid Enrollment** group, enrollment patterns vary:

- 42 percent of **Fluid Enrollment** students attended mostly full-time, meaning they were full-time students for the majority of their enrollment
- A similar proportion (37 percent) of **Fluid Enrollment** students attended mostly part-time, meaning they were part-time students for the majority of their enrollment
- One-in-five **Fluid Enrollment** students enrolled in an equal number of full-time and part-time semesters.

**Figure 2. Enrollment Patterns Over Four Years
(Fall 2014 to Spring 2018): Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Cohort**



³ Since the goal of the report is to examine the enrollment trends and outcomes of degree-seeking students, this Brief excludes 3,930 students who were not program-placed. This group includes students who were dual-enrolled, as well as students who clearly indicated they did not plan to pursue a degree at NOVA.

Student Outcomes by Enrollment Intensity

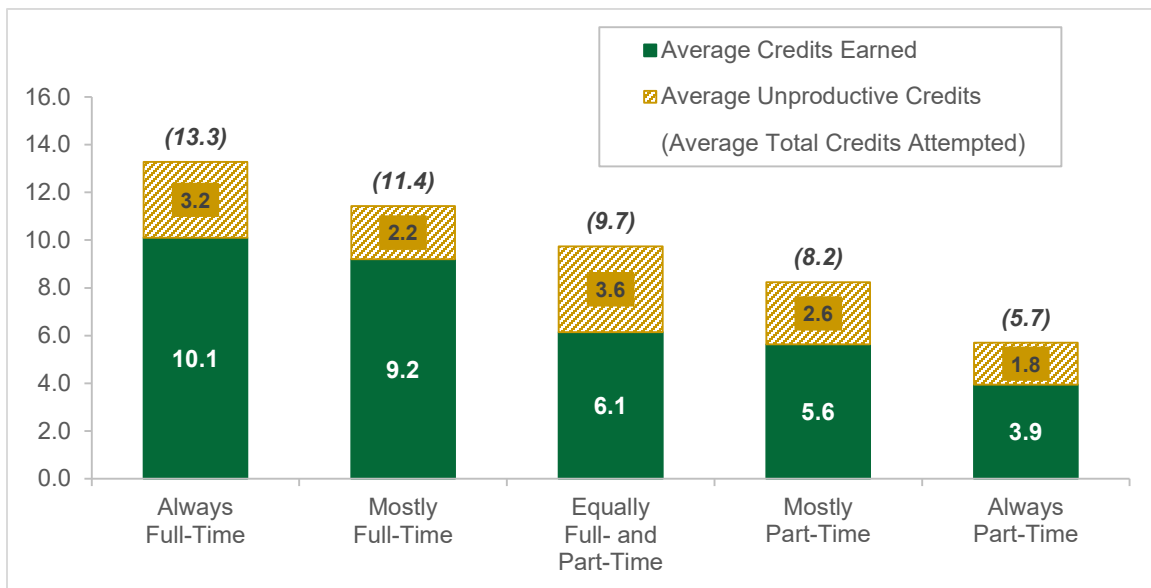
Data on the following pages presents student outcomes of the Fall 2014 first-time to NOVA, program-placed (FTTN/PP) cohort. Students were divided into five groups⁴ based on their enrollment patterns over the four-year period from Fall 2014 to Spring 2018:

- 1) **Always Full-Time:** Enrolled full-time every semester
- 2) **Mostly Full-Time:** Enrolled in a majority of semesters full-time
- 3) **Equally Full-/Part-Time:** Enrolled in an equal number of full- and part-time semesters
- 4) **Mostly Part-Time:** Enrolled in a majority of semesters part-time
- 5) **Always Part-Time:** Enrolled part-time every semester

Credits Attempted and Credits Earned (Figure 3)

- Not surprisingly, **Always Full-Time** and **Mostly Full-Time** students both attempted and earned the highest number of credits each semester.
- **Equally Full- and Part-Time**, **Mostly Part-Time**, and **Always Part-Time** students had the highest proportion of unproductive credits—that is, credits that were attempted but not earned. On average, these three enrollment groups earned only two-thirds of all credits attempted each semester.

Figure 3. Average Credits Attempted, Credits Earned, and Unproductive Credits by Enrollment Status: Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Cohort



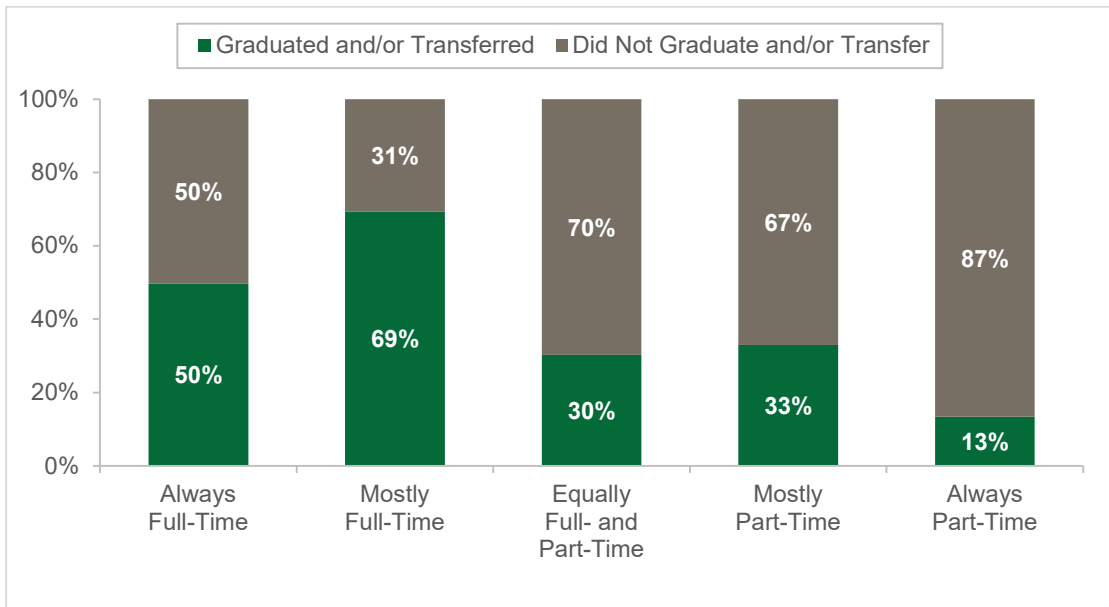
Note: Figure only includes credits that count towards graduation; credits earned in developmental courses were excluded. Only terms in which a student was enrolled were taken into account for average credits calculations.

⁴ A sixth group of students—those who only attended NOVA during the Fall 2014 semester (approximately 16 percent of the total Fall 2014 FTTN/PP population) and did not re-enroll for any subsequent semester—were excluded from analyses in this section.

Student Outcomes after Four Years (Figure 4)

- The highest graduation and/or transfer rate was observed among the **Always Full-Time** (50 percent graduated and/or transferred within four years of initial enrollment) and **Mostly Full-Time** (69 percent) student groups.
 - **Mostly Full-Time** students had a higher graduation and/or transfer rate than **Always Full-Time** students. This suggests that the flexibility of taking one or two semesters part-time may help students maintain momentum when life becomes overwhelming or busy.
- Between 30 and 33 percent of **Equally Full- and Part-Time** and **Mostly Part-Time** students had graduated and/or transferred within four years.
- Only 13 percent of **Always Part-Time** students graduated and/or transferred in four years. However, it should be noted that a student who takes a majority of their terms part-time will typically require six or more semesters to accumulate the credits needed for graduation. This report only tracks students over four years.

Figure 4. Student Outcomes (Graduation and/or Transfer Rate) After Four Years by Enrollment Status: Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Cohort

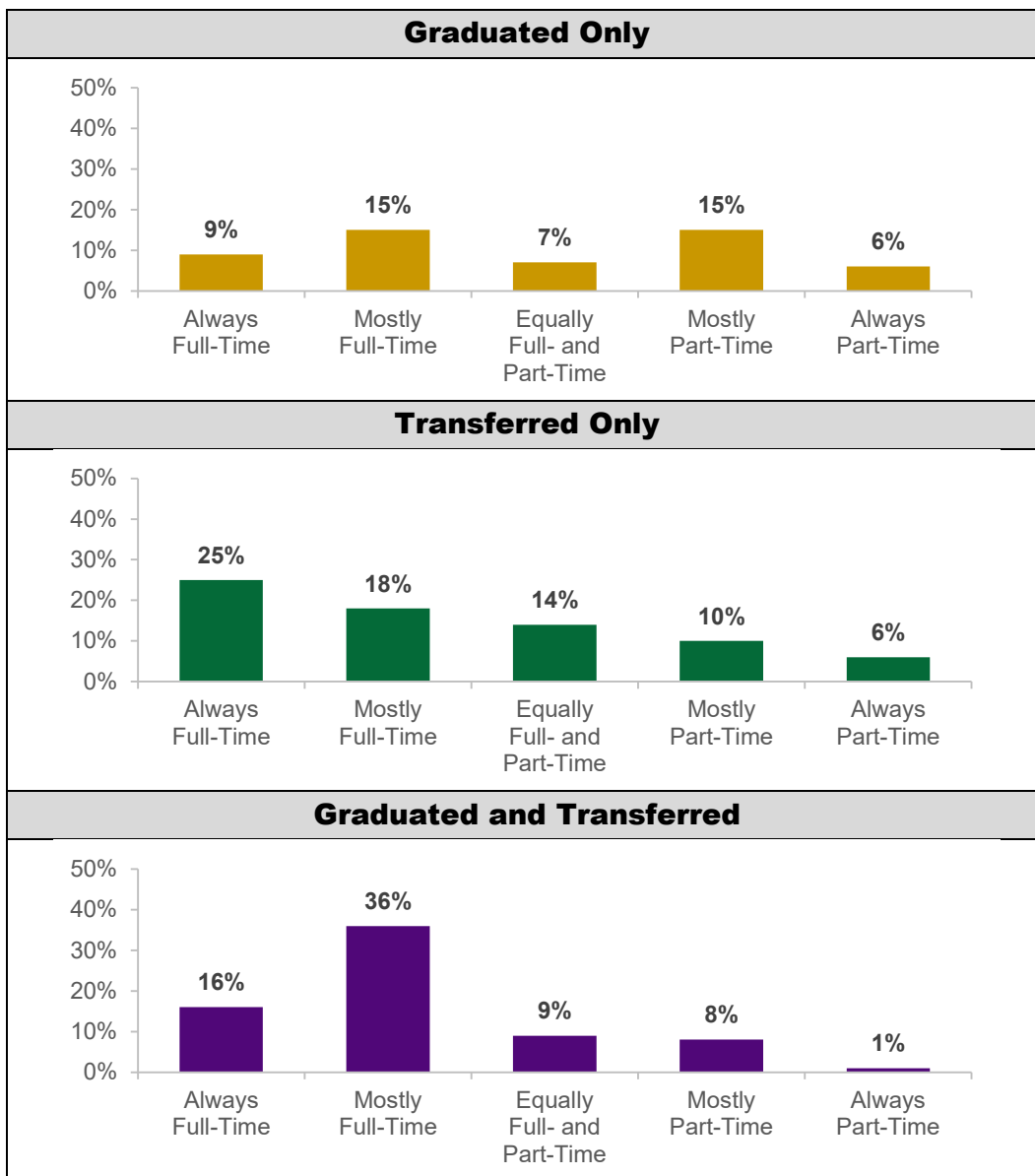


Graduated and/or Transferred (Figure 5)

Students who graduated and/or transferred within four years fell into two categories: graduated only, transferred only, and graduated and transferred.

- **Mostly Full-Time** and **Mostly Part-Time** students had the highest graduation only rates, but transfer only rates were highest among students who attended full-time.
- **Mostly Full-Time** students had the highest rates of graduating *and* transferring; almost no **Always Part-Time** students were able to both graduate and transfer to another institution during the four-year period.

Figure 5. Percentage of Students Who Graduated Only, Transferred Only, and Graduated and/or Transferred After Four Years by Enrollment Status: Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Students



Did Not Graduate and/or Transfer (Figures 6 and 7)

Students who did not graduate and/or transfer fell into two categories: those who stopped out completely and those who are still enrolled at the College.

- Relative to other groups, the **Always Part-Time** group had the highest proportion of students who had stopped out completely, meaning they did not graduate or transfer and did not enroll in classes in Spring 2018.
- A sizeable proportion of **Mostly Part-Time** (30 percent) and **Always Part-Time** (15 percent) students were still enrolled at the College after the four-year period.
- This suggests a four-year period is not sufficient time to complete a degree for a student who takes all or most semesters part-time, but many of these students are still working toward achieving academic goals.

Figure 6. Percentage of Students Who Stopped Out After Four Years by Enrollment Status: Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Students

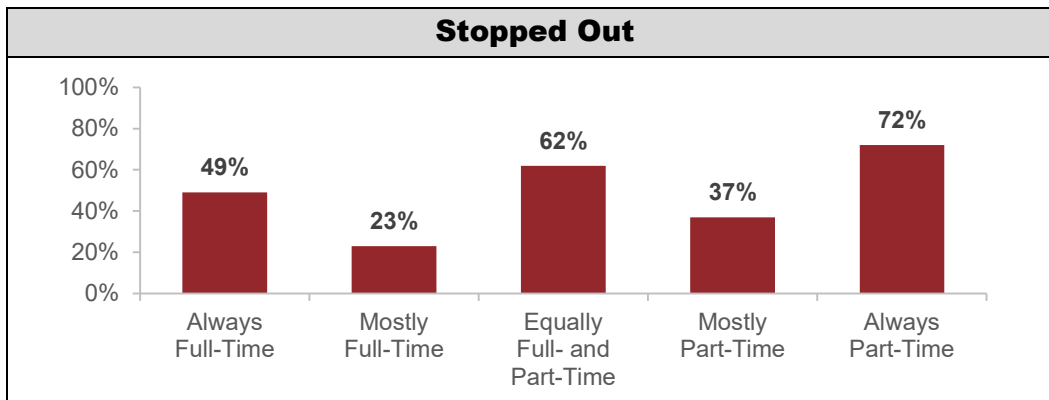
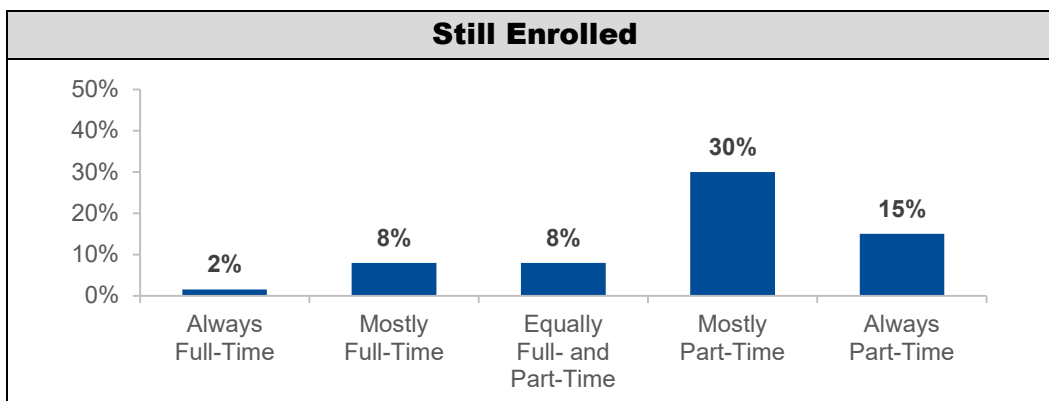


Figure 7. Percentage of Students Who Were Still Enrolled After Four Years by Enrollment Status: Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Students



Appendix: Data Tables

**Figure A1. Enrollment Patterns Over Four Years
(Fall 2014 to Spring 2018): Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Cohort**

Enrollment Status Over Four Years	Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Cohort	
	#	%
Always Full-Time	1,038	12.0
Mostly Full-Time	2,481	28.6
Equally Full- and Part-Time	1,194	13.8
Mostly Part-Time	2,202	25.4
Always Part-Time	1,752	20.2
Total	8,667	100.0

*Excludes students who only attended NOVA for one semester in Fall 2014.

**Table A2. Credits Attempted, Credits Earned,
and Unproductive Credits: Fall 2014 FTTN/PP Cohort**

Average Credits	Always Full-Time	Mostly Full-Time	Equally Full- and Part-Time	Mostly Part-Time	Always Part-Time
	#	#	#	#	#
Average Credits Attempted	13.3	11.4	9.7	8.2	5.7
Average Credits Earned	10.1	9.2	6.1	5.6	3.9
Average Unproductive Credits	3.2	2.2	3.6	2.6	1.8
Percent (%) Unproductive	24.1%	19.3%	37.1%	31.7%	31.6%

**Table A3: Student Outcomes after Four-Years
by Enrollment Status: Fall 2014 FTTN Program-Placed Cohort**

Student Outcome	Always Full-Time		Mostly Full-Time		Equally Full- and Part-Time		Mostly Part-Time		Always Part-Time	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Still Enrolled	16	1.5	202	8.1	98	8.2	666	30.2	259	14.8
Graduated	91	8.8	370	14.9	82	6.9	322	14.6	107	6.1
Transferred	256	24.7	447	18.0	169	14.2	228	10.4	106	6.1
Graduated and Transferred	168	16.2	903	36.4	110	9.2	176	8.0	21	1.2
Did Not Graduate or Transfer	507	48.8	559	22.5	735	61.6	810	36.8	1,259	71.9
Total	1,038	100.0	2,481	100.0	1,194	100.0	2,202	100.0	1,752	100.0