

# Start Strong Policy Evaluation Series – Policy 5: Student Development Course (SDV) Fall 2014 through Fall 2016

Research Report No. 04-17

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success Initiatives  
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## NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

### OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES

The purpose of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success Initiatives is to conduct analytical studies and provide information in support of institutional planning, policy formulation, and decision making. In addition, the office provides leadership and support in research related activities to members of the NOVA community engaged in planning and evaluating the institution's success in accomplishing its mission.

When citing data from this report, the Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success Initiatives must be cited as the source.

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# Introduction

## I. Background

In Fall 2014, as part of NOVA's efforts to increase student success, NOVA enacted six policy changes based on recommendations by NOVA's Achieving the Dream Core Team. Five of these policies apply only to students in NOVA's *GPS for Success* population: first-time to college students between the ages of 17 and 24.<sup>1</sup> The sixth policy is for all NOVA students.

*GPS for Success: Teaching and Learning through Advising* focuses on the Goals, Plans, and Strategies that students must develop to attain their academic objectives and promotes early engagement, class readiness, student preparedness, and goal attainment. By targeting the GPS population, these five policies are designed to promote a strong academic start for first-time to college students at NOVA.

Students in this group must:

1. Take placement tests before registration.
2. Attend Student Orientation before registration.
3. Meet with their advisor before registration.
4. Enroll in developmental courses during the first semester, if placed.
5. Complete a Student Development (SDV) course within the first 15 credits at NOVA.

The sixth policy impacts *all* NOVA students:

6. Register before 11:59 p.m. the day before the session begins.

## II. Policy 5: Completion of a Student Development (SDV) Course

This Report is part of a series examining the impact of these policy changes on student outcomes and focuses on Policy 5: Complete a Student Development (SDV) course within the first 15 credits at NOVA.

Student Development (SDV) 100/101 is a one-credit course on subjects such as time management, note taking and test preparation, academic planning, career decision making, financial literacy, and critical thinking. In Fall 2014, NOVA implemented a policy requiring all GPS students to complete (with a grade of D or better) SDV 100 or SDV 101 within their first year. At that time, GPS students could receive an exemption from the SDV requirement by passing the Assessment by Local Examination (ABLE).

In Fall 2015, the SDV policy was revised such that all GPS students were required to complete an SDV course within their *first 15 credits* at NOVA (instead of in their first year), and students could no longer use ABLE to be exempt from the course.

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<sup>1</sup> Excludes transient students and students who are members of the College Pathway Initiative.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Section 1. Compliance with SDV Policy**

- Since NOVA's SDV policy was implemented in Fall 2014, over half of students in each cohort have complied with the policy. Final compliance data is not yet available for the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts.

### **Section 2. Progression of SDV Compliance by Cohort**

- Around half of students in each fall cohort completed SDV in fall and around 5 percent completed in Spring.
- The percentage of the entire cohort who failed SDV in the fall decreased from 20 percent of the Fall 2014 cohort to 14 percent of the Fall 2016 cohort.
- In the Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 cohorts, 2 percent of students took the course in both the fall and spring semesters and failed both times.

### **Section 3. Outcomes by Compliance with SDV Policy**

#### ***GPA***

- The average GPA of students who completed SDV was around 1 point higher than that of students who did not complete SDV.
- The average GPA of students who completed SDV remained steady across each of the three fall cohorts, at 2.7.

#### ***Success in Credit Courses***

- Overall, students who completed SDV in the fall semester were more likely to be successful in credit courses (as measured by earning a grade of C or better) than those who did not. The course success rate for students who completed SDV was 80 percent, which was about 30 percentage points higher than students who did not complete SDV.

#### ***Fall-to-Spring Retention***

- Ninety percent of SDV completers returned to NOVA in the spring semester, which was about 20 percentage points higher than those who did not complete SDV.

#### ***Credit Hours***

- Students who completed SDV in the fall took an average of 12 credits per semester, compared to 10 credits per semester for those who did not complete SDV.

## Section 1. Compliance with SDV Policy

### Compliance

- On average, 54 percent of NOVA students were in compliance with the SDV policy.

Since NOVA’s SDV policy was implemented in Fall 2014, a little over half (between 50 and 57 percent) of students in each fall cohort of first-time students have complied with the policy by completing SDV with a grade of D or better.

Although compliance appears to have declined since Fall 2014, it is important to note that 18 percent of the Fall 2015 cohort and 30 percent of the Fall 2016 cohort still have time to complete SDV and comply with the policy and thus cannot be considered not compliant.

**Table 1. Compliance with SDV Policy: Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts<sup>2</sup>**

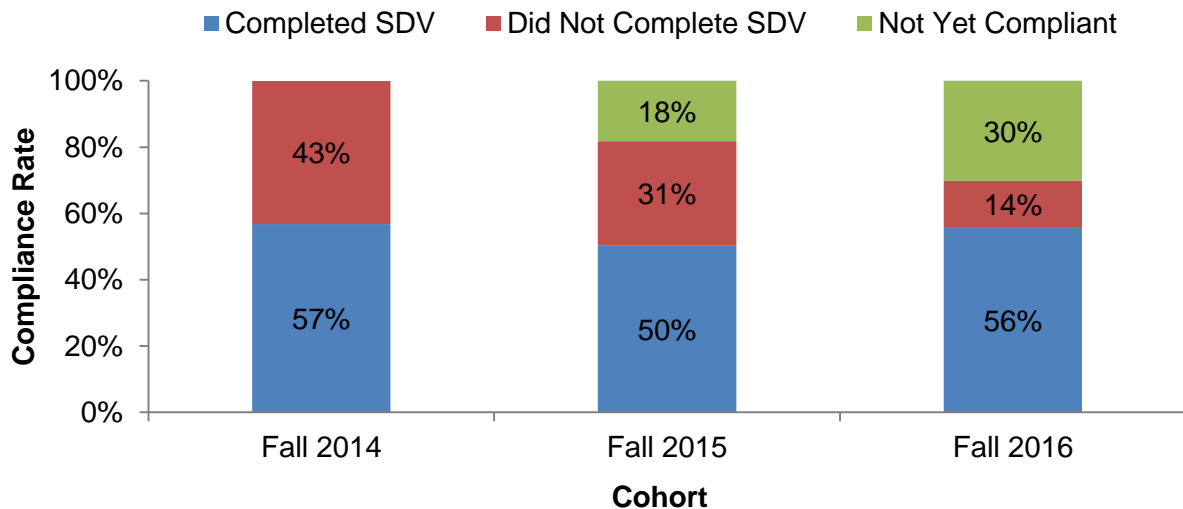
Compliance Status	Fall 2014 Cohort		Fall 2015 Cohort		Fall 2016 Cohort	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Compliant*	2,781	56.8	2,632	50.4	2,940	55.6
Not Yet Compliant**	-	-	951	18.2	1,590	30.1
Not Compliant***	2,110	43.1	1,642	31.4	757	14.3
<b>Total SDV Cohort</b>	<b>4,891</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,225</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5,287</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\*Includes students who completed SDV 100 or 101 with a grade of D or better in their first year at NOVA (for the Fall 2014 cohort) or in their first 15 credits at NOVA (for the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts).

\*\*Includes students who have attempted fewer than 15 credits at NOVA and thus may comply with the policy in a future semester. This excludes the Fall 2014 cohort, as the policy at that time required students to complete SDV within their first year rather than their first 15 credits.

\*\*\*Includes students who have attempted more than 15 credits at NOVA without earning a grade of D or better in an SDV course.

**Figure 1. Compliance with SDV Policy: Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



<sup>2</sup> In the Fall 2014 cohort, 63 students were exempt from taking SDV via the ABLÉ and are not included in the “Total SDV Cohort.” “Total SDV Cohort” also excludes students who complied with the policy in the 5 years prior to the fall semester (79 students in Fall 2014, 72 students in Fall 2015, and 251 students in Fall 2016).

## Section 2. Progression of SDV Compliance by Cohort

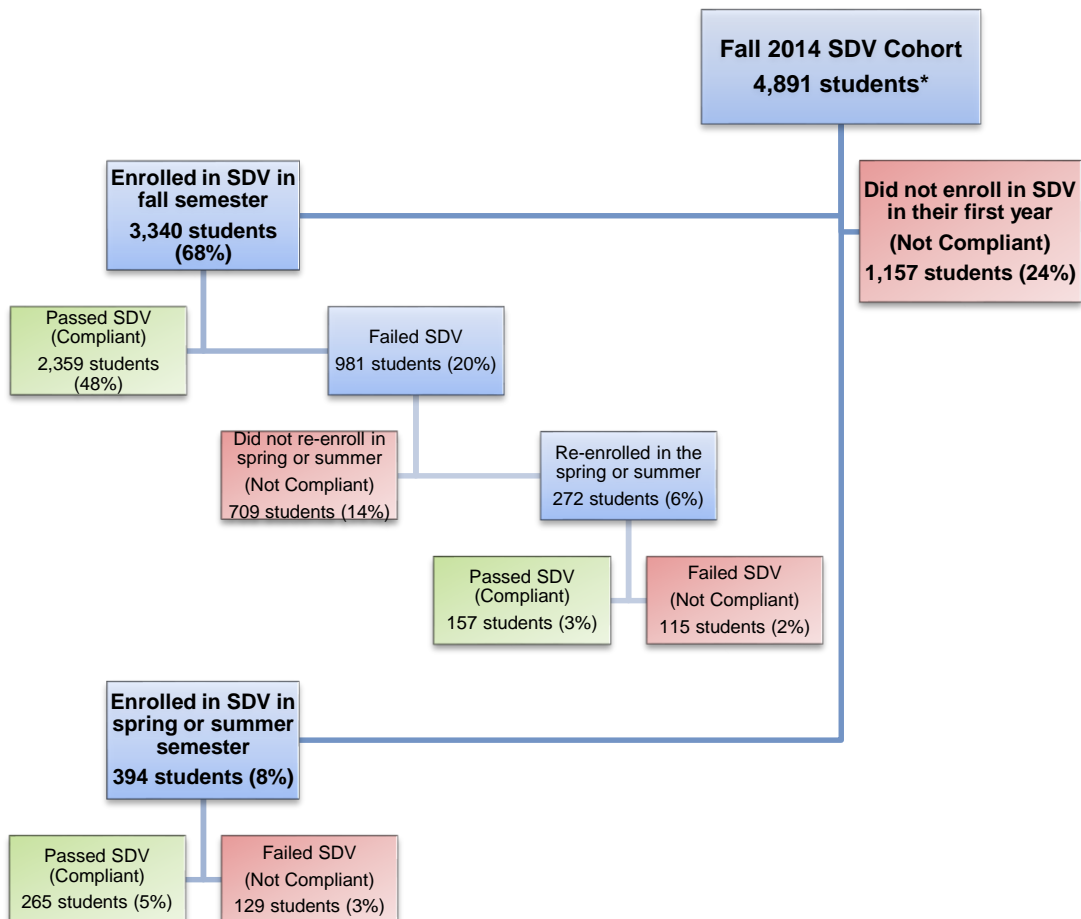
This section examines student compliance with SDV policy by tracking each cohort's progression through SDV 100/101. In Figures 2, 3, and 4, the green boxes show the subgroups of the original cohort that complied with the SDV policy.

### Fall 2014 Cohort Progression

- Forty-eight percent of students completed SDV in their first semester, while another 8 percent of students completed SDV in the spring or summer semester.

As Figure 2 shows, the majority of students (68 percent) enrolled in an SDV course in the fall semester, while 8 percent enrolled in either the spring or summer semesters, and 24 percent did not enroll in SDV at all in their first year. Twenty percent of students failed SDV in the fall, with 3 percent re-enrolling in the spring or summer and passing the course, thus complying with the policy. Two percent of the cohort (115 students) took the course in the fall and spring semesters and failed both times. Two percent of the cohort (115 students) took the course in the fall and spring semesters and failed both times.

Figure 2. Progression through SDV 100/101: Fall 2014 Cohort



\*Excludes 79 students who complied with the policy in the 5 years prior to Fall 2014 (for example, via dual enrollment).  
Note: All percentages based on the overall cohort (N=4,891). Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

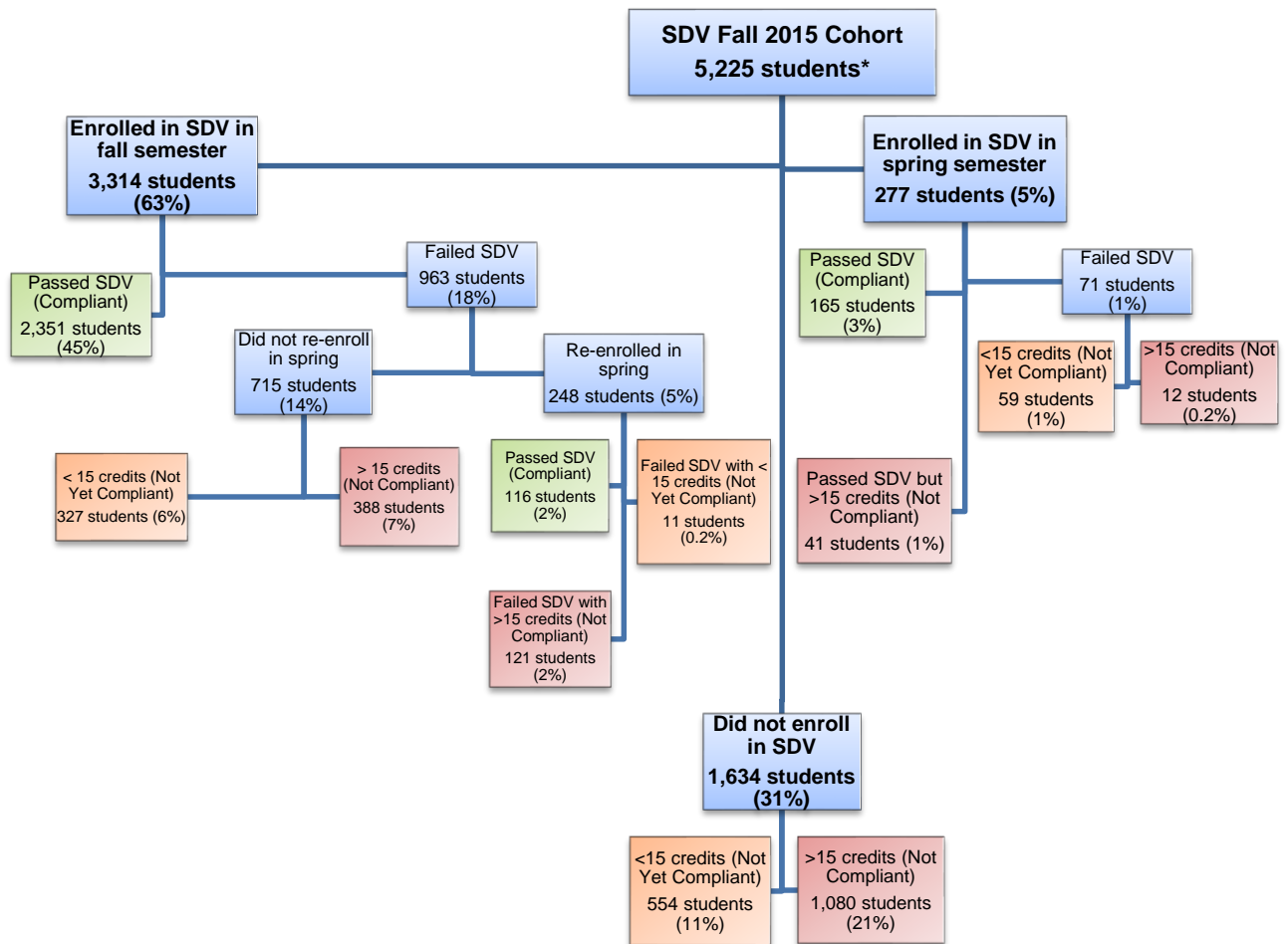
### Fall 2015 Cohort Progression

- Forty-five percent of students completed SDV within their first semester, while another 5 percent of students completed SDV in the following spring semester.

The majority of the Fall 2015 cohort (Figure 3) also enrolled in SDV in the fall semester (63 percent), while only 5 percent enrolled in the spring semester and 31 percent did not enroll in either the fall or spring semesters.<sup>3</sup> Eighteen percent of the cohort failed SDV in the fall; 2 percent re-enrolled in the spring and passed. As in the Fall 2014 cohort, around 2 percent failed SDV in both the fall and spring semesters.

Approximately 8 percent of the Fall 2015 cohort (397 students) failed SDV in either the fall or spring semesters but have fewer than 15 credits and thus may be able to retake the course and comply with the policy. An additional 11 percent (554 students) did not attempt SDV in either semester but have fewer than 15 credits and may also become compliant in the future.

**Figure 3. Progression through SDV 100/101: Fall 2015 Cohort**



\*Excludes 72 students who complied with the policy in the 5 years prior to Fall 2015.

Note: All percentages based on the overall cohort (N=5,225). Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

<sup>3</sup> Only fall and spring semester data are examined for the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts.

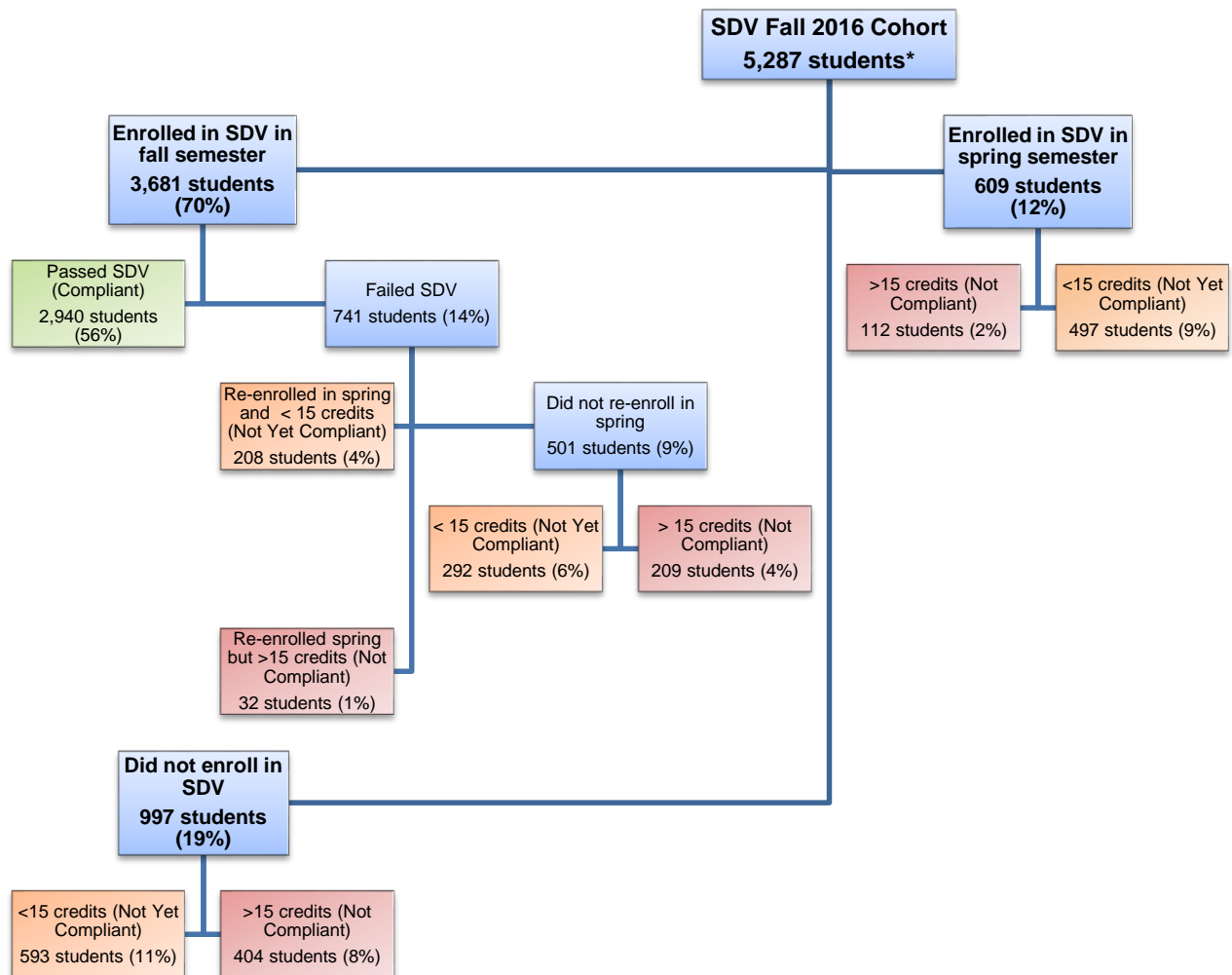


**Fall 2016 Cohort Progression**

- **Fifty-six percent of students completed SDV within their first semester; 13 percent have enrolled in an SDV course in the Spring 2017 semester and will be considered compliant if they earn a grade of D or better in that course.**

For the Fall 2016 cohort (Figure 4), compliance data is currently only available for students who enrolled in SDV in the fall semester. However, as with the other cohorts, the majority of students in the Fall 2016 cohort enrolled in SDV in the fall semester (70 percent) and passed (56 percent), thus complying with the policy. Four percent of the cohort (208 students) failed SDV in the fall and re-enrolled in the spring. Overall, approximately 30 percent of students in the Fall 2016 cohort have not yet complied with the SDV policy but have fewer than 15 credits and thus may comply in the future.

**Figure 4. Progression through SDV 100/101: Fall 2016 Cohort**



\*Excludes 251 students who complied with the policy in the 5 years prior to Fall 2016.

Note: All percentages based on the overall cohort (N=5,287). Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

### Section 3. Outcomes by Compliance with SDV Policy

This section examines the success outcomes of students who completed SDV in the fall semester. While NOVA policy requires students to complete SDV within their *first 15 credits*, the data below reflect only students who completed SDV in the *fall semester* of each cohort. Thus, this data does not include, for example, students who took fewer than 15 credits in the fall and completed SDV in the spring, even though those students complied with the SDV policy. However, across all cohorts, the majority of students who complied with the SDV policy did so in the fall semester rather than in the spring or summer semester (see Section 2), and thus this section focuses on success metrics for these students.

#### GPA

- **Students who completed SDV had an average GPA that was around 1 point higher than those who did not.**

Students who completed SDV in the fall semester tended to have higher GPAs than those who did not, as shown in Table 2 and Figures 5 and 6.

The average GPA of students who completed SDV was between 0.9 and 1.2 points higher than that of students who did not complete SDV. The average GPA of SDV completers remained steady across each of the past three fall cohorts, at 2.7.

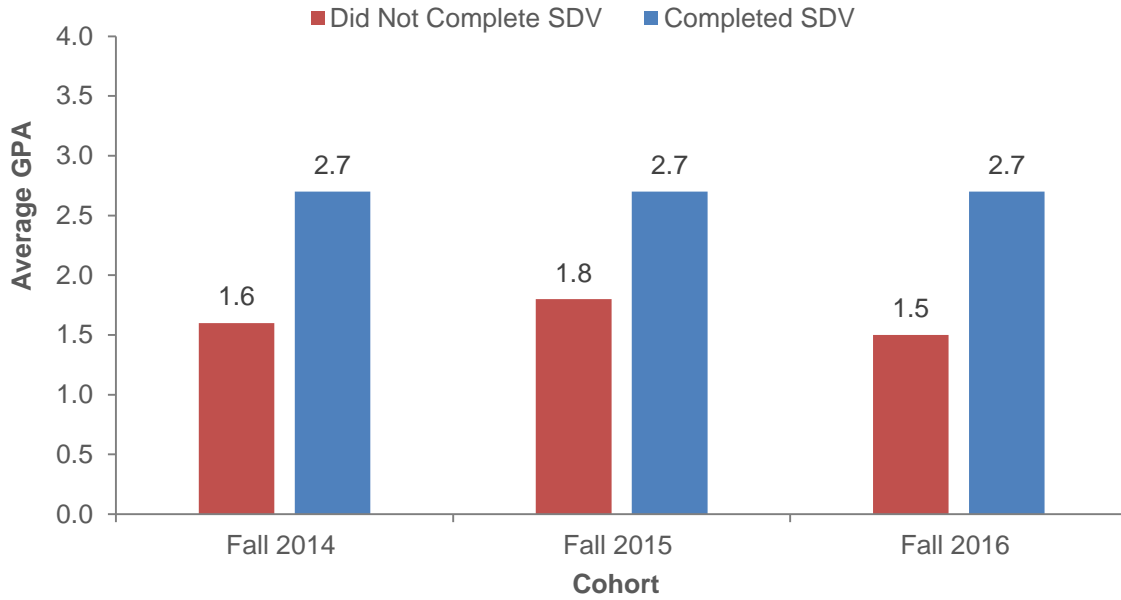
Among students who did not complete SDV, between 40 and 50 percent earned a GPA of 2.0 and above and only 23 to 31 percent earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher. In contrast, between 78 and 81 percent of students who completed SDV had GPAs of 2.0 and above and 48 to 51 percent had a GPA of 3.0 and above. Similarly, between 37 and 45 percent of students who did not complete SDV had a GPA of less than 1.0, compared to only 6 to 7 percent of SDV completers.

**Table 2. First Semester GPA by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**

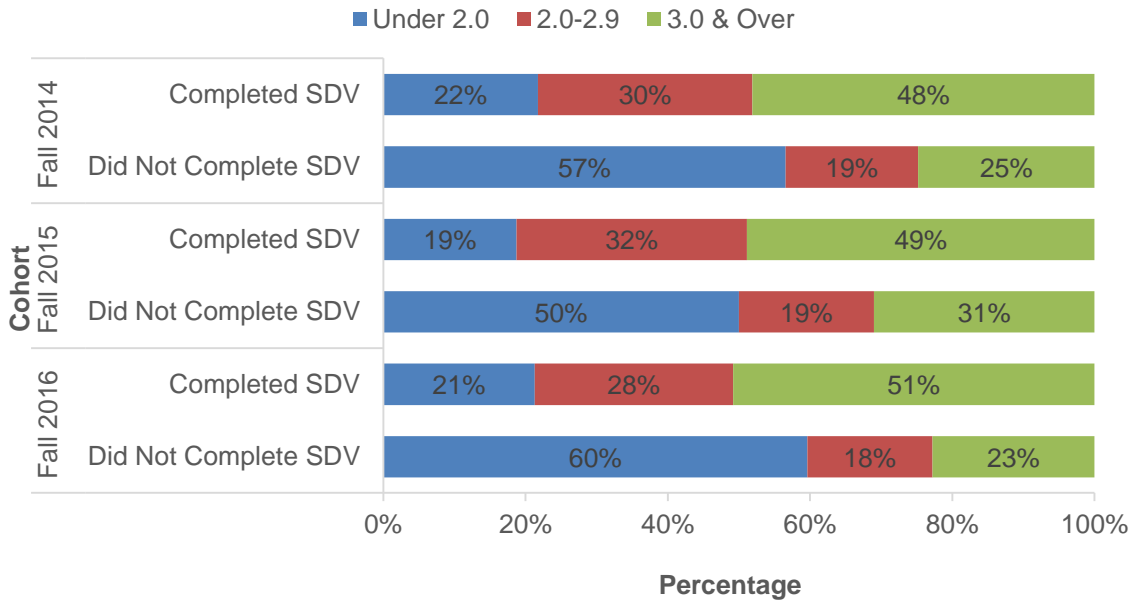
GPA Range	Fall 2014 Cohort				Fall 2015 Cohort				Fall 2016 Cohort			
	Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV		Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV		Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0.0 – 0.9	1,051	41.5	172	7.1	1,051	36.6	144	5.9	1,050	44.7	217	6.8
1.0 – 1.9	381	15.0	358	14.7	385	13.4	310	12.8	349	14.9	462	14.5
2.0 – 2.9	472	18.6	735	30.2	545	19.0	785	32.4	413	17.6	890	27.9
3.0 – 3.9	450	17.8	865	35.5	635	22.1	906	37.4	366	15.6	1,176	36.9
4.0	178	7.0	308	12.6	255	8.9	278	11.5	169	7.2	446	14.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,532</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,438</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,871</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,347</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,191</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Average GPA</b>	<b>1.6</b>		<b>2.7</b>		<b>1.8</b>		<b>2.7</b>		<b>1.5</b>		<b>2.7</b>	

Note: Students in each cohort who did not enroll in any credit courses in the fall semester are excluded.

**Figure 5. Average GPA by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



**Figure 6. First Semester GPA by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



### Success in Credit Courses

- Overall, students who completed SDV earned a grade of C or better in nearly 80 percent of their credit courses; students who did not complete SDV were successful in roughly 48 percent of their credit courses.

The course success rate (as measured by earning a grade of C or better) for students who completed SDV ranged from 78 to 80 percent, compared to a range of 47 to 51 percent among students who did not complete SDV (Table 3 and Figure 7).

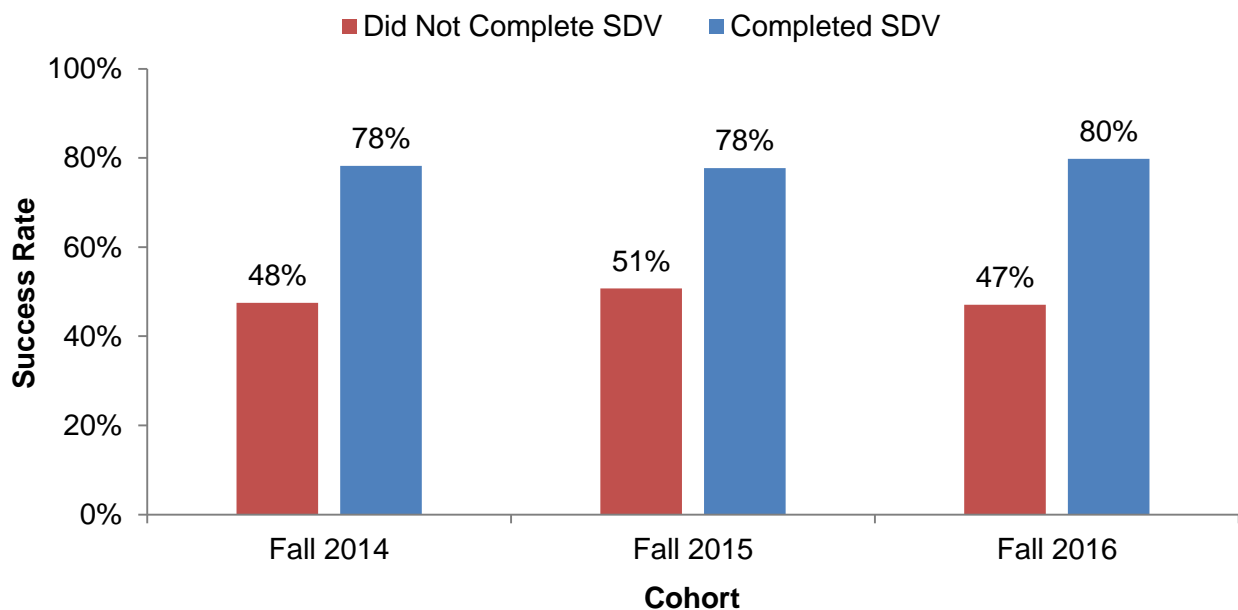
In Fall 2016, the course success rate of SDV completers was 33 percentage points higher than that of students who did not complete SDV.

**Table 3. Success in Credit Courses by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**

Course Outcome	Fall 2014 Cohort				Fall 2015 Cohort				Fall 2016 Cohort			
	Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV		Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV		Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Success	4,423	47.5	8,557	78.2	5,336	50.7	8,577	77.7	3,823	47.1	11,498	79.8
Fail	4,881	52.5	2,391	21.8	5,195	49.3	2,461	22.3	4,293	52.9	2,918	20.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,304</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>10,948</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>10,531</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>11,038</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>8,116</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>14,416</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Earning a grade of 'C' or higher is considered an indicator of success in credit courses. Students in each cohort who did not enroll in any credit courses in the fall semester are excluded. The totals are duplicated headcounts. Missing/audit courses are not included.

**Figure 7. Success in Credit Courses by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



### Fall-to-Spring Retention

- On average, 90 percent of students who completed SDV returned to NOVA in the spring semester compared to approximately 69 percent of students who did not complete SDV.

Students who completed SDV were more likely to return to NOVA in the spring than those who did not. Between 90 and 91 percent of SDV completers returned to NOVA in the spring semester, compared to between 63 and 74 percent of those who did not complete SDV (Table 4 and Figure 8).

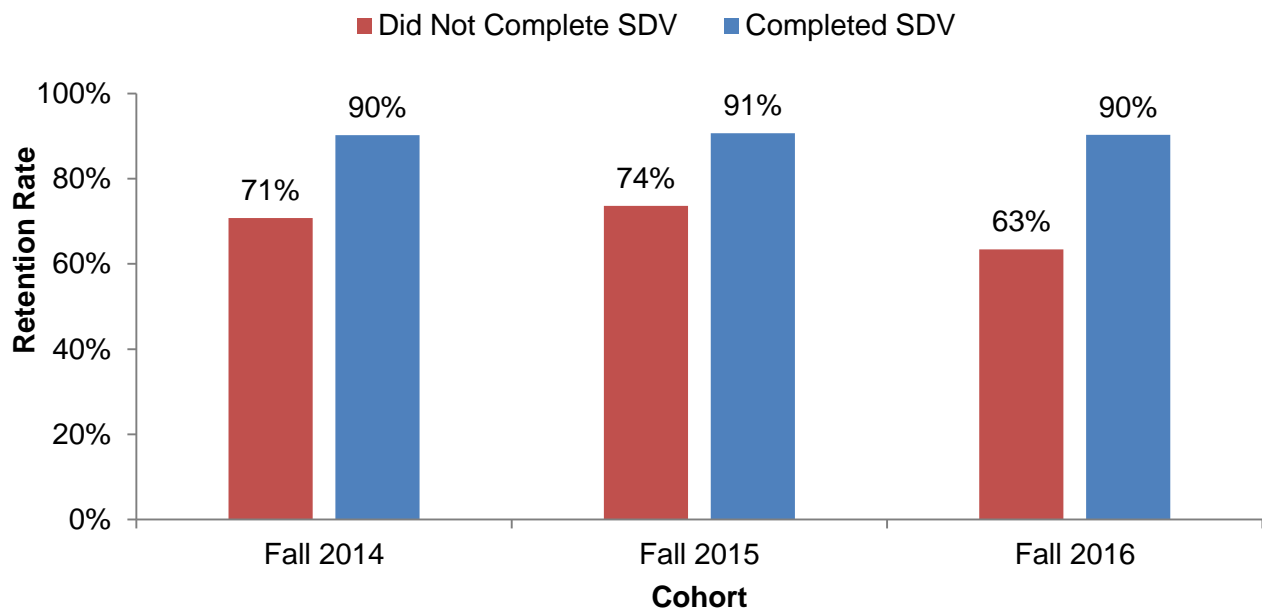
**Table 4. Fall-to-Spring Retention by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**

Retention Status	Fall 2014 Cohort				Fall 2015 Cohort				Fall 2016 Cohort*			
	Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV		Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV		Did Not Complete SDV		Completed SDV	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Returned in Spring	1,793	70.8	2,200	90.2	2,116	73.6	2,198	90.7	1,489	63.4	2,880	90.3
Did Not Return in Spring	739	29.2	238	9.8	758	26.4	225	9.3	858	36.6	311	9.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,532</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,438</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,874</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,423</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,347</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,191</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Students in each cohort who did not enroll in any credit courses in the fall semester are excluded.

\*Spring 2017- Preliminary data as of January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

**Figure 8. Fall-to-Spring Retention by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



**Average Credit Hours**

- On average, students who completed SDV were enrolled in around 2 more credit hours in the fall semester than those who did not.

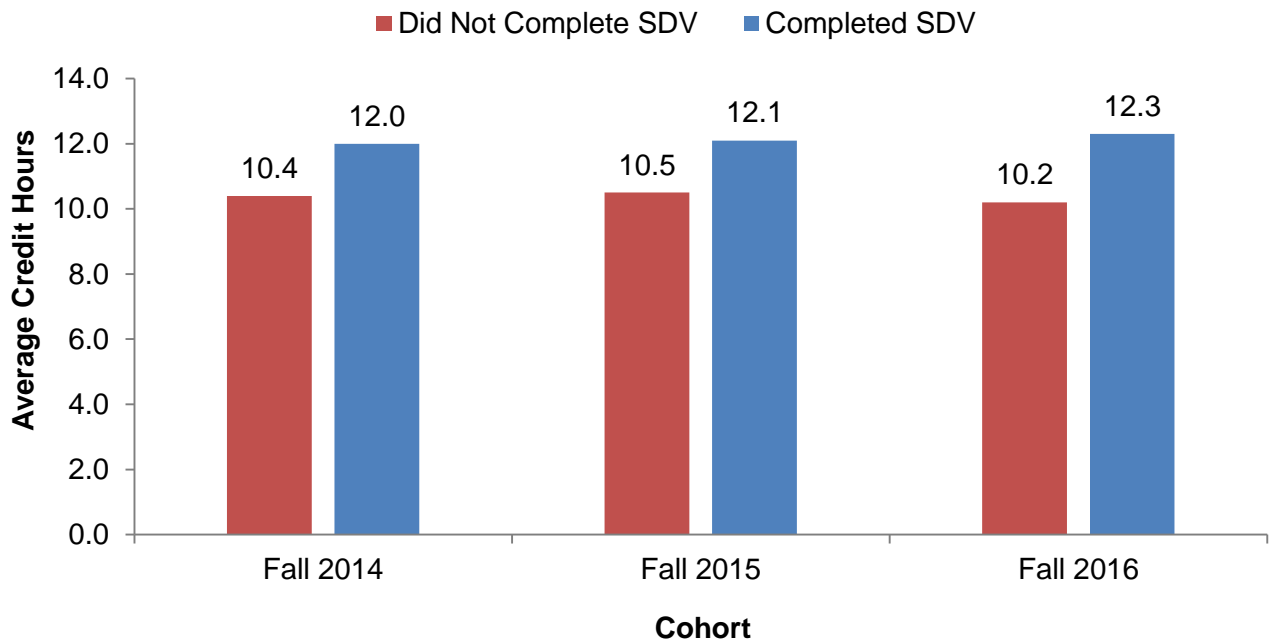
On average, students who completed SDV were enrolled in more credit hours than those who did not (Table 5 and Figure 9). Students who completed SDV took an average of 12 credits per semester, compared to 10 credits per semester for those who did not complete SDV.

**Table 5. First Semester Credit Hours by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**

Semester Credit Hours	Fall 2014 Cohort		Fall 2015 Cohort		Fall 2016 Cohort	
	Did Not Complete SDV	Completed SDV	Did Not Complete SDV	Completed SDV	Did Not Complete SDV	Completed SDV
Average Credit Hours	10.4	12.0	10.5	12.1	10.2	12.3

Note: Data reflects only those students who completed SDV within their first fall semester and excludes students who completed SDV in a subsequent semester. Thus, some students who complied with the SDV policy are excluded from this table.

**Figure 9. Average First Semester Credit Hours by Compliance with SDV Policy:  
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



## Conclusion

On average, 54 percent of students complied with the SDV policy in each of the three cohorts examined in this report. Most students who complied with the policy did so in the fall semester.

Overall, students who completed SDV (with a grade of D or better) in the fall semester were more successful at NOVA in terms of GPA, success in credit courses, and fall-to-spring retention than students who did not complete SDV.

On average, students who completed SDV:

- Attained an **average GPA** that was **around 1 point higher** than those who did not, even though they were also enrolled in approximately **2 more credit hours** in the fall semester than those who did not complete SDV.
- **Earned a grade of C or better** in nearly 80 percent of their credit courses, which was around **30 percentage points higher** than those who did not.
- **Returned in the spring** at a rate of 90 percent, which was around **20 percentage points higher** than those who did not.

## ***NOVA Mission and Strategic Goals***

### **Mission**

With commitment to the values of access, opportunity, student success, and excellence, the mission of Northern Virginia Community College is to deliver world-class in-person and online post-secondary teaching, learning, and workforce development to ensure our region and the Commonwealth of Virginia have an educated population and globally competitive workforce.

### **Strategic Goals**

- I. **STUDENT SUCCESS** – Northern Virginia Community College will move into the top tier of community colleges with respect to the college readiness, developmental course completion, retention, graduation, transfer, and career placement of its students.
- II. **ACCESS** – Northern Virginia Community College will increase the number and diversity of students being served to mirror the population growth of the region.
- III. **TEACHING AND LEARNING** – Northern Virginia Community College will focus on student success by creating an environment of world-class teaching and learning.
- IV. **EXCELLENCE** – Northern Virginia Community College will develop ten focal points of excellence in its educational programs and services that will be benchmarked to the best in the nation and strategic to building the College's overall reputation for quality.
- V. **LEADERSHIP** – Northern Virginia Community College will serve as a catalyst and a leader in developing educational and economic opportunities for all Northern Virginians and in maintaining the quality of life and economic competitiveness of the region.
- VI. **PARTNERSHIPS** – Northern Virginia Community College will develop strategic partnerships to create gateways of opportunity and an integrated educational system for Northern Virginians who are pursuing the American Dream.
- VII. **RESOURCES** – Northern Virginia Community College will increase its annual funding by \$100 million and expand its physical facilities by more than one million square feet in new and renovated space. This includes the establishment of two additional campuses at epicenters of the region's population growth, as well as additional education and training facilities in or near established population centers.
- VIII. **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS** – Northern Virginia Community College will be recognized as a leader among institutions of higher education in Virginia for its development and testing of emergency response and continuity of operation plans.



# **NOVA**

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