

Start Strong Policy Evaluation Series – Policies 2 & 3: Student Orientation and Advising Fall 2013 through Fall 2016

Research Report No. 03-17

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success Initiatives
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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 24.¹ 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. Policies 2 & 3: Student Orientation and Advising

This Report is part of a series examining the impact of these policy changes on student outcomes and focuses on Policies 2 and 3: Attend Student Orientation before registration and meet with an advisor before registration.

Student Orientation is designed to familiarize students with NOVA's policies and resources and to provide them with the knowledge, insight, and tools needed to register for courses. At orientation, students take part in the following activities: interpretation of placement test scores, developing academic goals, creating a class schedule and registering for courses, and learning about payment options and financial aid.

Meeting with an advisor is an additional component of student orientation, via either a group session or through one-on-one sessions. Since early advising takes place within orientation, and all students who attend orientation will have met with an advisor, compliance and outcome data are presented on both the orientation and advising policies together.

¹ Excludes transient students and students who are members of the College Pathway Initiative.

Summary of Findings

Section 1. Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies

- The percentage of the GPS cohort who attended orientation and received advising decreased by almost 4 percentage points from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016, from 89 to 85 percent.
- Students who attended orientation and received advising as required enrolled in an average of 2 to 4 more credit hours in the Fall semester than those who did not attend orientation.

Section 2. Outcomes by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies

Note about Outcomes: The information and resources provided at orientation sessions are designed to help students succeed in the transition to college. Available research does not show that attending orientation has an immediate effect on the metrics studied within this Report, such as first semester GPA and course success.² Rather, orientation seems to enhance students' level of connectivity with the college.ⁱ It is this greater level of involvement which may in turn affect measurable student success metrics such as retention.ⁱⁱ

Fall-to-Spring Retention

- Students who attended orientation and advising were more likely to re-enroll at NOVA for a second semester in the Spring with retention rates 10 to 14 percentage points higher than those who did not attend.

GPA

- Students who complied with the policies to attend orientation and receive advising earned the same or very slightly higher average first semester GPAs compared to students who did not comply with the policies.

Success in Credit Courses

- Students who complied with the policies to attend student orientation and receive advising had overall first semester course success rates 2 to 4 percentage points lower than those who did not attend.

² In this Report, orientation refers to a pre-college orientation session and not a longer orientation course or freshman seminar, formats which may have a more pronounced impact on student success outcomes.

Section 1. Compliance with Student Orientation and Advising Policies

Orientation provides an opportunity for students to form connections with peers and other campus staff, and to learn about available support resources.

The percentage of the GPS cohort who attended orientation and received advising decreased by almost four percentage points from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016, from 89 to 85 percent. While there was a decrease in compliance, over 200 additional students attended orientation and received advising in Fall 2016 (4,791 students) compared to Fall 2014 (4,565 students). Given the importance of the information presented during orientation, as well as the benefits of meeting with an advisor to help set academic and career goals, it is imperative that faculty and staff continue to promote attendance at orientation.

Compliance

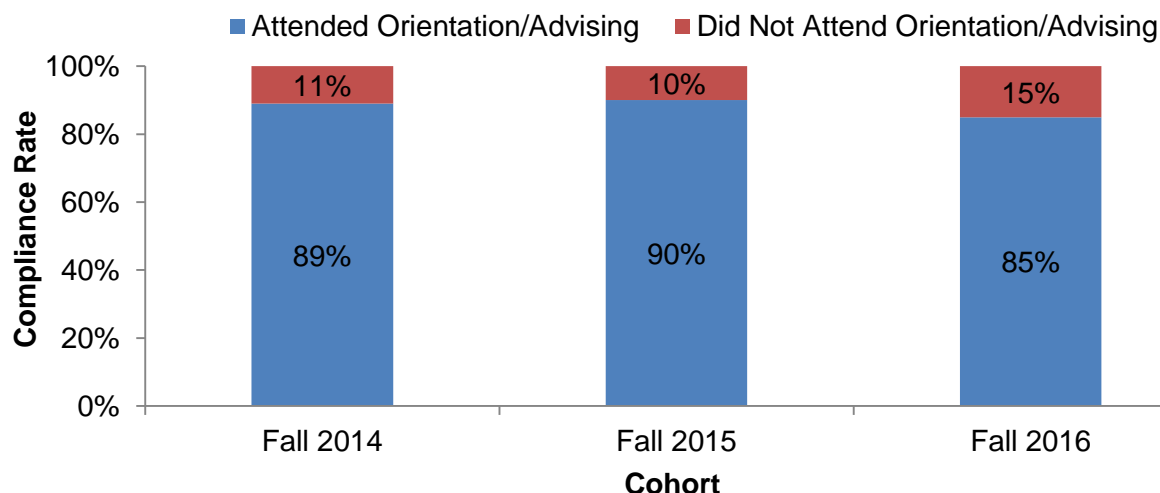
- The percentage of the GPS cohort who attended orientation and received advising decreased by almost 4 percentage points from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016, from 89 to 85 percent.

**Table 1. Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies:
Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**

Compliance Status	Fall 2013		Fall 2014		Fall 2015		Fall 2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Attended Orientation/Advising*	--	--	4,565	88.8	4,890	90.3	4,791	85.1
Did Not Attend	--	--	577	11.2	528	9.7	838	14.9
Advising/Orientation Cohort	4,895	100.0	5,142	100.0	5,418	100.0	5,629	100.0

*Includes students who attended orientation at any point prior to or during the Fall term. Fall 2014 data includes students who attended from May 2014 through December 2014. Excludes a small number of students who attended online orientation through ELI. "--" Data not available.

**Figure 1. Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies:
Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**



In each of the three cohorts from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016, students who attended orientation and received advising as required enrolled in a higher number of average credit hours in the Fall semester compared to those who did not attend. In Fall 2016, students who complied with the policies enrolled in an average of 11.7 credit hours compared to 9.5 credit hours for students who did not comply with the policies.

At NOVA, students who complied with the orientation and advising policies may have enrolled in a larger course load as a result of meeting with an advisor, which enables students to choose appropriate courses and map out their enrollment. This finding may also indicate that full-time students were more likely to attend orientation and advising compared to part-time students, and perhaps is representative of the greater level of campus engagement typically found among full-time students. Part-time students who enrolled in one or two courses at NOVA in their first Fall semester may not have recognized the value of attending orientation and advising, particularly if they did not plan to continue their studies at NOVA beyond one or two semesters.

Average Credit Hours

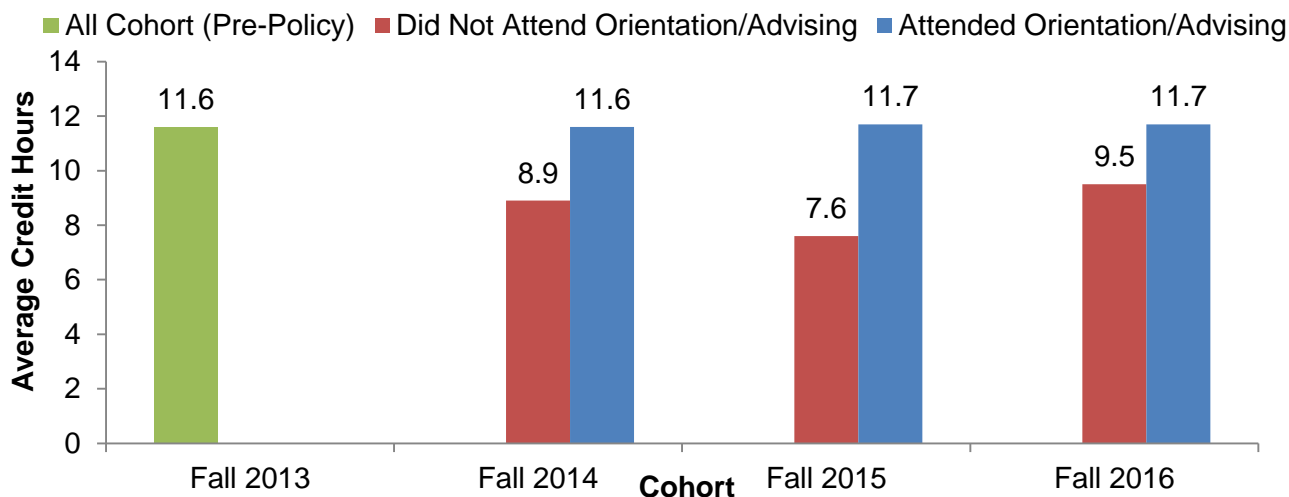
- Students who attended orientation and received advising as required enrolled in an average of 2 to 4 more credit hours in the Fall semester than those who did not attend orientation.

Table 2. Average First Semester Credit Hours by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts

Semester Credit Hours	Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort		Fall 2015 Cohort		Fall 2016 Cohort	
		Did Not Attend Orientation/Advising	Attended Orientation/Advising	Did Not Attend Orientation/Advising	Attended Orientation/Advising	Did Not Attend Orientation/Advising	Attended Orientation/Advising
Average Credit Hours	11.6	8.9	11.6	7.6	11.7	9.5	11.7

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

Figure 2. Average First Semester Credit Hours by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts



Section 2. Outcomes by Compliance with Student Orientation and Advising Policies

Note About Outcomes

- The information and resources provided at orientation sessions are designed to help students succeed in the transition to college. Available research does not show that attending orientation has an immediate effect on the metrics studied within this Report, such as first semester GPA and course success. Rather, orientation seems to enhance students' level of connectivity with the college.ⁱⁱⁱ It is this greater level of involvement which may in turn affect measurable student success metrics such as retention.^{iv}

Research from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) shows that student orientation can lead to higher student satisfaction and campus engagement.^v Additionally, orientation and advising can help students make a successful transition to college by helping them to establish relationships with faculty, peers, and other campus staff.^{vi} This greater sense of connectivity with the college may lead to greater levels of student success and persistence. These outcomes, however, may not be evident in a student's first semester.

This section focuses on several first semester success metrics to determine whether the benefits of orientation and advising can be measured and demonstrated after one semester of enrollment.

Fall-to-Spring Retention

Prior research on the effects of student orientation programs on retention shows varied results, with some support that orientation promotes a campus culture of persistence, retention, and graduation, particularly among at-risk students.^{vii,viii,ix,x,xi}

Students who attended orientation and advising at NOVA were more likely to re-enroll for a second semester in the Spring, with retention rates 10 to 14 percentage points higher than those who did not attend. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 3 (next page), students in the Fall 2015 cohort who attended orientation and advising had a Fall-to-Spring retention rate 14 percentage points higher than those who did not (83 percent and 69 percent, respectively). Among students in the Fall 2014 and Fall 2016 cohorts, those who complied with the student orientation and early advising policies had a Fall-to-Spring retention rate 10 percentage points higher than students who did not comply with the policies (82 and 72 percent, and 80 and 70 percent, respectively).

Students who attended orientation and advising may have been more aware of and thus better able to take advantage of available campus resources aimed at improving student success. Students who were compliant with the policies may have formed stronger connections to peers, faculty, and the campus itself, which has been shown to increase retention.^{xii} Additionally, students who received advising at orientation may have enrolled in more appropriate courses

and had a clear plan for degree completion, increasing their likelihood of re-enrollment. It is also possible that students who attended orientation and advising in each of the three cohort years exhibited additional characteristics that increased their likelihood of re-enrolling at NOVA in the Spring semester, including full-time enrollment and enrollment in a degree program.

Fall-to-Spring Retention

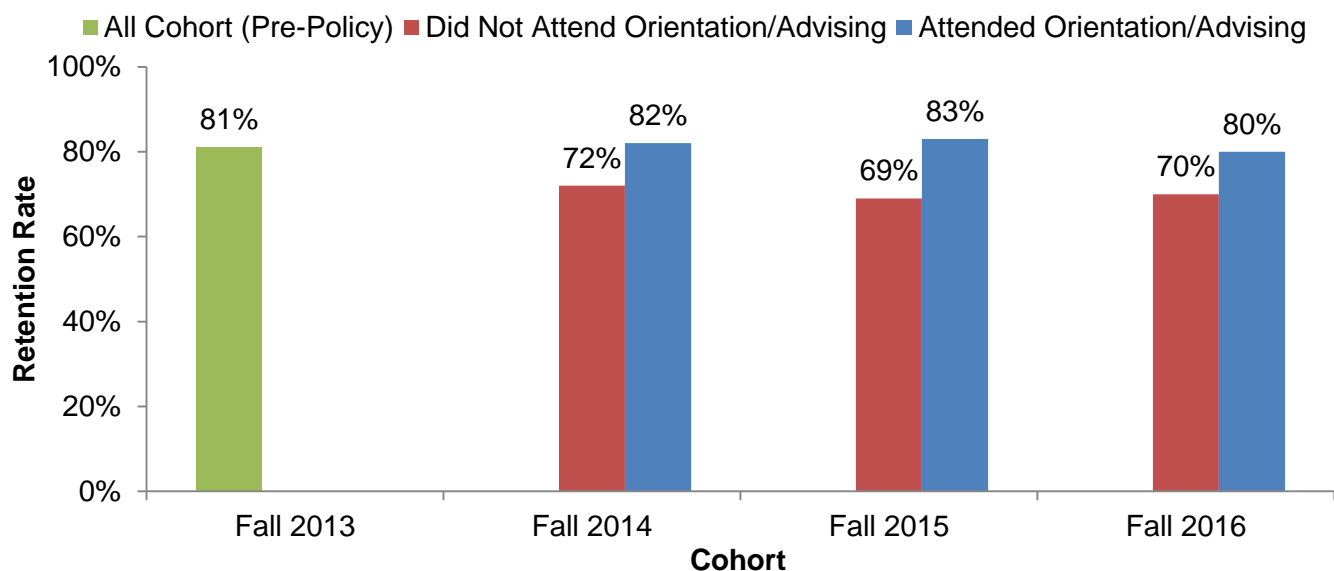
- Students who attended orientation and advising were more likely to re-enroll at NOVA for a second semester in the Spring with retention rates 10 to 14 percentage points higher than those who did not attend.

Table 3. Fall-to-Spring Retention by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts

Retention Status	Fall 2013 Cohort		Fall 2014 Cohort				Fall 2015 Cohort				Fall 2016 Cohort			
			Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising		Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising		Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Returned in Spring	3,871	81.2	351	71.9	3,707	81.5	295	68.6	4,019	82.6	525	69.5	3,844	80.4
Did Not Return in Spring	895	18.8	137	28.1	841	18.5	135	31.4	848	17.4	230	30.5	939	19.6
Total	4,766	100.0	488	100.0	4,548	100.0	430	100.0	4,867	100.0	755	100.0	4,783	100.0

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

Figure 3. Fall-to-Spring Retention by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts



GPA

Available research does not show a strong association between higher GPAs and the completion of student orientation. Some studies show higher GPAs among orientation

participants, though the results often have limited statistical significance.^{xiii} The benefits of orientation and advising may be better demonstrated through surveys of student engagement and awareness of campus support initiatives. College GPA is more often associated with academic preparedness.

Thus it is not surprising that, in each of the three cohorts analyzed, students who complied with the policies to attend orientation and advising earned the same or very slightly higher average first semester GPAs compared to students who did not comply with the policies. In the Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 cohorts, students who attended orientation and advising were no more likely to earn first semester GPAs of 2.0 and higher (roughly a C or above) than students who did not attend. In Fall 2016, 62 percent of students who attended orientation (2,982 students) earned a first semester GPA of 2.0 or better, compared to 63 percent of students who did not attend orientation (478 students) (Table 4 and Figure 4, next page).

However, students who did not comply with the orientation and advising policies were more likely to earn first semester GPAs of 0.9 and below compared to students who did comply. In Fall 2016, 26 percent of non-compliant students (196 students) earned a GPA in this range, compared to 22 percent (1,071 students) of compliant students.

Given that the prior section of this Report showed that students who complied with the orientation and advising policies were more likely to enroll in a greater number of credit hours in their first semester, one possible explanation for the GPA results is that students who complied with the policy were more likely to enroll in different types of courses, including higher level courses that may have been more challenging.

GPA

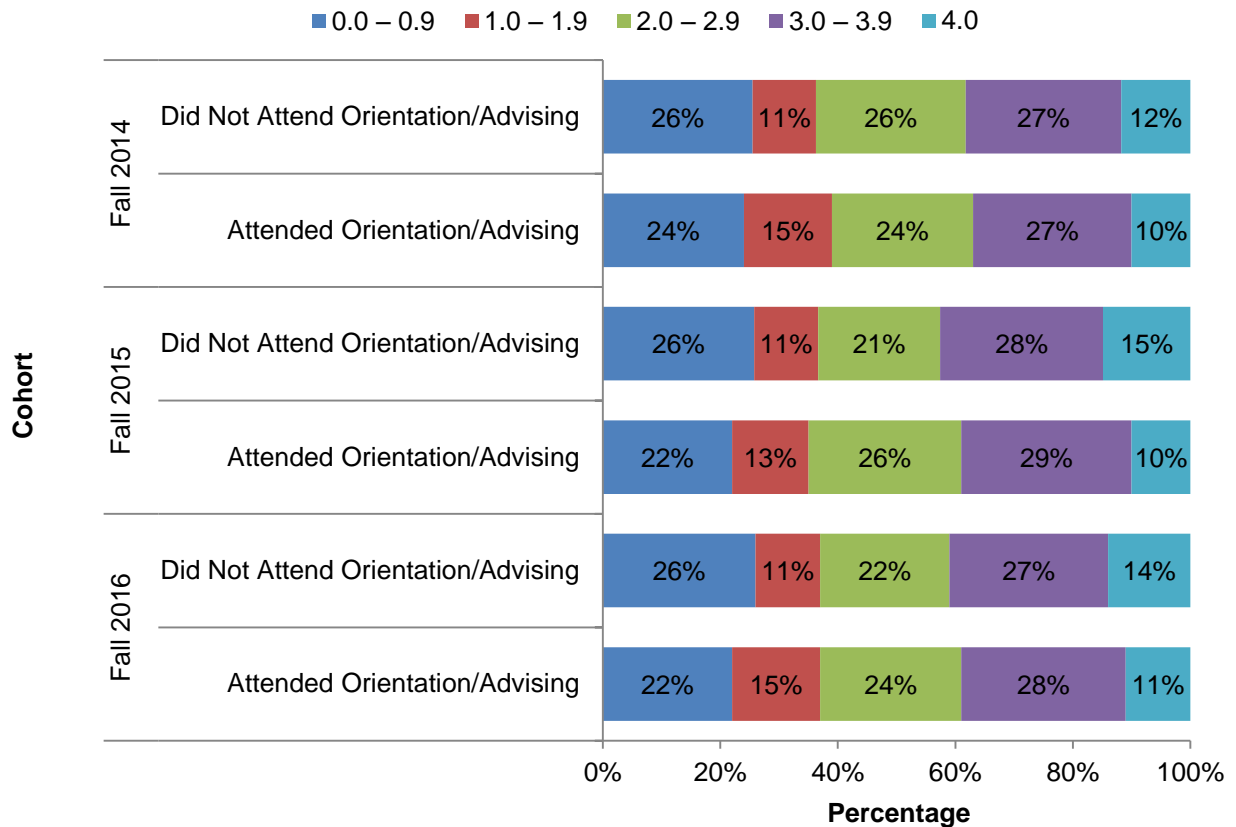
- Students who complied with the policies to attend orientation and receive advising earned the same or very slightly higher average first semester GPAs compared to students who did not comply with the policies.

**Table 4. First Semester GPA by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies:
Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts**

GPA Range	Fall 2013 Cohort		Fall 2014 Cohort				Fall 2015 Cohort				Fall 2016 Cohort			
			Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising		Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising		Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
0.0 – 0.9	1,098	23.0	125	25.6	1,102	24.2	109	25.5	1,086	22.3	196	26.0	1,071	22.4
1.0 – 1.9	609	12.8	52	10.7	693	15.2	45	10.5	650	13.4	81	10.7	730	15.3
2.0 – 2.9	1,215	25.5	125	25.6	1,099	24.2	90	21.1	1,240	25.5	162	21.5	1,141	23.9
3.0 – 3.9	1,386	29.1	130	26.6	1,214	26.7	118	27.6	1,423	29.2	207	27.4	1,335	27.9
4.0	458	9.6	56	11.5	440	9.7	65	15.2	468	9.6	109	14.4	506	10.6
Total	4,766	100.0	488	100.0	4,548	100.0	427	100.0	4,867	100.0	755	100.0	4,783	100.0
Avg. GPA	2.20		2.13		2.13		2.19		2.20		2.18		2.20	

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

Figure 4. First Semester GPA by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2014 through Fall 2016 Cohorts



Success in Credit Courses

As with GPA, available research does not show an association between orientation and advising and course success. Rather, course success is generally more strongly correlated with student academic preparation and motivation and student effort.^{xiv} Students who complied with the policies to attend student orientation and receive advising at NOVA in Fall 2016 had an overall first semester course success rate (as measured by earning a grade of C or higher) that was 4 percentage points lower than those who did not attend (68 percent for those who attended and 72 percent for those who did not). Similar results were also observed in Fall 2014 and Fall 2015: 68 vs. 64 percent in Fall 2014; 66 vs. 64 percent in Fall 2015 (Table 5 and Figure 5, next page). It should also be noted that both groups of students had higher course success rates in Fall 2016 compared to Fall 2014.

Again, more research is necessary to show whether students who attended orientation and advising enrolled in different types of courses compared to students who did not. Future research could compare the course success rate among compliant and non-compliant students enrolled in the same courses, ensuring a more balanced comparison.

Success in Credit Courses

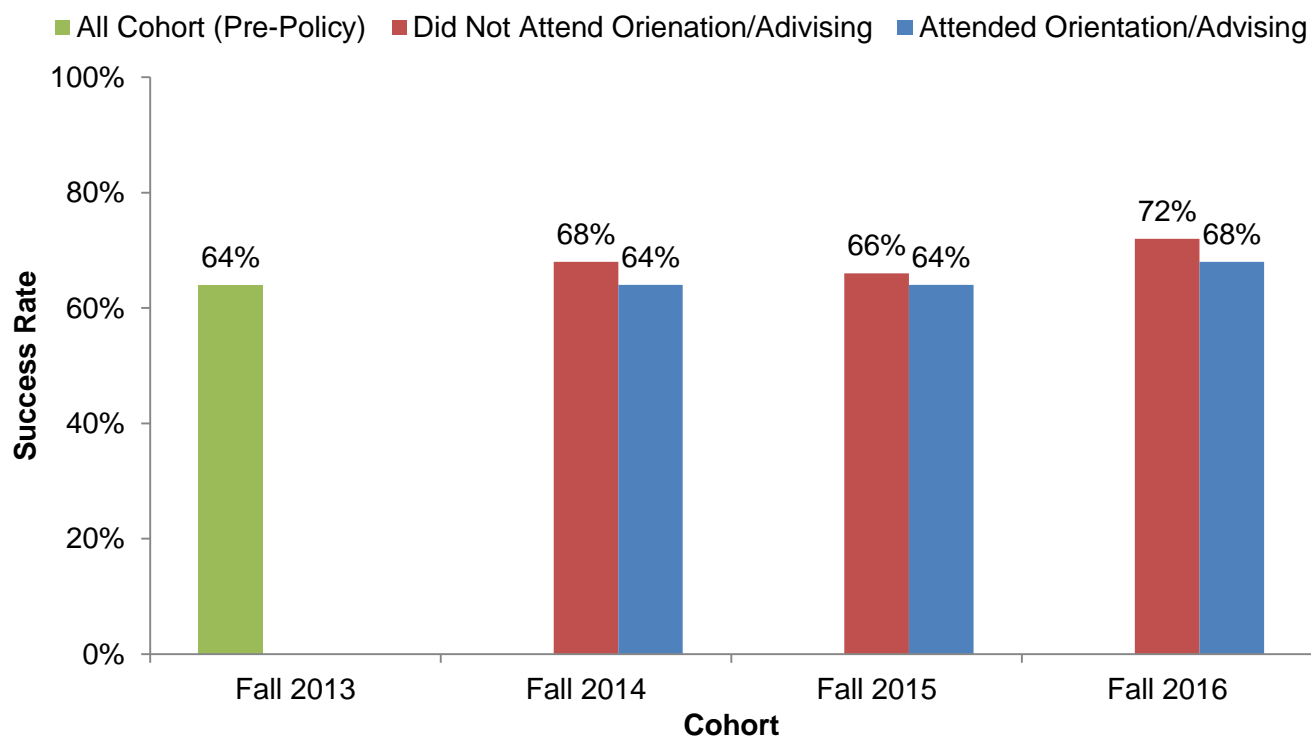
- Students who complied with the policies to attend student orientation and receive advising had overall first semester course success rates 2 to 4 percentage points lower than those who did not attend.

Table 5. Success in Credit Courses by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts

Course Outcome	Fall 2013 Cohort		Fall 2014 Cohort				Fall 2015 Cohort				Fall 2016 Cohort			
			Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising		Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising		Did Not Attend Orientation/ Advising		Attended Orientation/ Advising	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Success	12,160	63.7	1,176	67.5	12,033	64.0	902	65.8	13,011	64.4	1,917	71.6	13,404	67.5
Fail	6,932	36.3	565	32.5	6,758	36.0	469	34.2	7,187	35.6	759	28.4	6,452	32.5
Total	19,092	100.0	1,741	100.0	18,791	100.0	1,371	100.0	20,198	100.0	2,676	100.0	19,856	100.0

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 grades are not included.

Figure 5. Success in Credit Courses by Compliance with Orientation and Advising Policies: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016 Cohorts



Conclusion

The majority (between 85 and 90 percent) of GPS students from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016 attended orientation and received advising prior to enrolling in courses at NOVA. The data presented in this Report show that students who attended orientation and advising had higher Fall-to-Spring retention rates in each of the three cohorts examined. Although students who complied with the orientation and advising policies did not necessarily show higher first semester average GPAs or higher levels of course success compared to students who were not compliant with the policies, this was expected and is consistent with the findings in current academic literature on the impacts of orientation and advising on student success.

The benefits of orientation and advising go beyond what can be captured by looking at measures of first semester student success. The policies mandating orientation and advising prior to enrollment seek to foster student connections with faculty, peers, and the NOVA community. These higher levels of student engagement may be related to overall student satisfaction and may lead more students to achieve their academic goals.

To better understand the outcomes associated with participation in orientation and advising, future studies could survey students regarding their experiences with the programs and gauging their awareness of campus resources. In addition, with more data in the future, student outcomes can be tracked across a longer period of time to better understand the relation between orientation and advising programs and student goal achievement.

ⁱ Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2012). *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

ⁱⁱ Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2012). *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

^{iv} Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

^v Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2012). *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success (A First Look)*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin, Community College Leadership Program.

^{vi} Rendon, L. (1995). *Facilitating retention and transfer for the first generation students in community colleges*. Paper presented at the New Mexico Institute, Rural Community College Initiative, Espanola, NM.

^{vii} Busby, R.R., Gammel, H.L., & Jeffcoat, N.K. (2002). Grades, graduation, and orientation: A longitudinal study of how new student orientation programs relate to grade point averages and graduation. *The Journal of College Orientation and Transition*, 10(1), 45-50.

^{viii} Glass, J.C. & Garret, M.S. (1995). Student participation in a college orientation course, retention, and grade point average. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 19(2), 117-132.

^{ix} Ryan, M. & Glenn, P. (2004). What do first-year students need most: Learning strategies instruction or academic socialization? *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 34(2), 4-28.

^x Willford, A.M., Chapman, L.C., & Kahrig, T. (2001). The university experience course: A longitudinal study of student performance, retention, and graduation. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 2(4), 327-340.

^{xi} Boylan, H. & Saxon, D. (2002). *What works in remediation: Lessons from 30 years of research*. Prepared for the League for Innovation in the Community College.

^{xii} Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

^{xiii} Hollins, T.H., Jr. (2009). Examining the impact of a comprehensive approach to student orientation. *The Journal of the Virginia Community Colleges*, 14(1), 15-27.

^{xiv} Svanum, S. & Bigatti, S.M. (2006). The influences of course effort and outside activities on grades in a college course. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 564-576.

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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