

Student Success Outcomes of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing: Fall 2014 Cohort

Research Report No. 05-18

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success
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NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	3
Fall-to-Spring Retention	5
Fall-to-Fall Retention.....	6
Graduation within Three Years.....	8
Transfer within Three Years	9
Appendix: Data Tables.....	11

List of Figures

Figure 1. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort	3
Figure 2. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort	4
Figure 3. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort	4
Figure 4. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	5
Figure 5. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	5
Figure 6. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	6
Figure 7. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	6
Figure 8. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	7
Figure 9. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	7
Figure 10. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort	8
Figure 11. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort	8
Figure 12. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort	9
Figure 13. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort	9
Figure 14. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort	10
Figure 15. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort	10

List of Data Tables

Table A1. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort	11
Table A2. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort	11
Table A3. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort	11
Table A4. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	12
Table A5. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	12
Table A6. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	12
Table A7. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	13
Table A8. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	13
Table A9. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort.....	13
Table A10. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort	14
Table A11. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort	14
Table A12. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort	14
Table A13. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort	15
Table A14. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort	15
Table A15. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort	15

Introduction

In Fall 2014, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) implemented six policy changes, one of which was mandatory placement testing in English and math for all first-time in college students between the ages of 17 and 24.

Placement exams prime students for learning and facilitate placement in classes that meet their academic needs and educational skill levels. Placement exams not only lead to better success outcomes, but they also provide valuable information about incoming students. This information can influence course requirements and help faculty tailor class plans. Placement exams can also help the college to track student progress. For some students, placement exams even offer a path for upward academic mobility—for example, a student who is placed in a remedial math course and graduates with a math degree.

This report presents data from the Virginia Placement Test in Math (VPT Math) for the Fall 2014 cohort of first-time to NOVA students (n=14,200), excluding dual enrollment students (n=2,467). Of the remaining 11,733 students from the cohort, 140 students (1.2 percent) had SAT, ACT, or GED scores above certain thresholds and were exempt from taking the math placement test; these students were excluded from analyses in this report. Analysis are based on the remaining 11,593 students. Data is presented by age group (24 and under versus 25 and older), program placement, and student type (first-time in college versus transfer-in).

Key Findings

Overall, students who took the VPT Math had better success outcomes than students who did not take the test, regardless of other student attributes. While taking VPT Math does not itself contribute to student success, the subsequent placement in a math course that addresses student deficiencies can ensure a student gets the basic skills needed to succeed in college.

- **Fall-to-Spring Retention:** For students aged 24 and under, those who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the spring semester at a rate **20 percentage points higher** than those who did not take the test (82 versus 62 percent). (Figure 4)
- **Fall-to-Fall Retention:** First-time in college students who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the fall semester at a rate **25 percentage points higher** than first-time in college students who did not take the test (66 versus 41 percent). (Figure 9)
- **Graduation Rates:** First-time in college students who took the VPT Math graduated from NOVA within three years at a rate **10 percentage points higher** than first-time in college students who did not take the test (20 versus 10 percent). (Figure 12)
- **Transfer Rates:** For students aged 24 and under, those who took the VPT Math transferred within three years at a rate **11 percentage points higher** than those who did not take the test (22 versus 11 percent). (Figure 13)

Limitations

This analysis is a descriptive analysis, not a causal analysis. Simply finding a relationship between taking a placement exam and college-level success is not sufficient evidence for concluding that the relationship is causal. Further, it does not answer how much of the variation in student success can be attributed to taking a placement exam and subsequently being placed in developmental or college-level math, compared to the impact of other cognitive and non-cognitive factors (such as student motivation, academic engagement, financial need, etc.) on student success.

Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students: Fall 2014 Cohort

Math placement testing is mandatory for first-time in college students between the ages of 17 and 24. Of the Fall 2014 first-time to NOVA cohort, 140 students (1.2 percent) had SAT, ACT, or GED scores above certain thresholds and were exempt from taking the math placement test; these students were excluded from analyses in this report.

- Seventy-eight percent of first-time to NOVA students aged 24 and under took the math placement test in the two years before enrolling at NOVA.
- Twenty-two percent of first-time to NOVA students aged 24 and under did not take the math placement test prior to enrolling at NOVA. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort

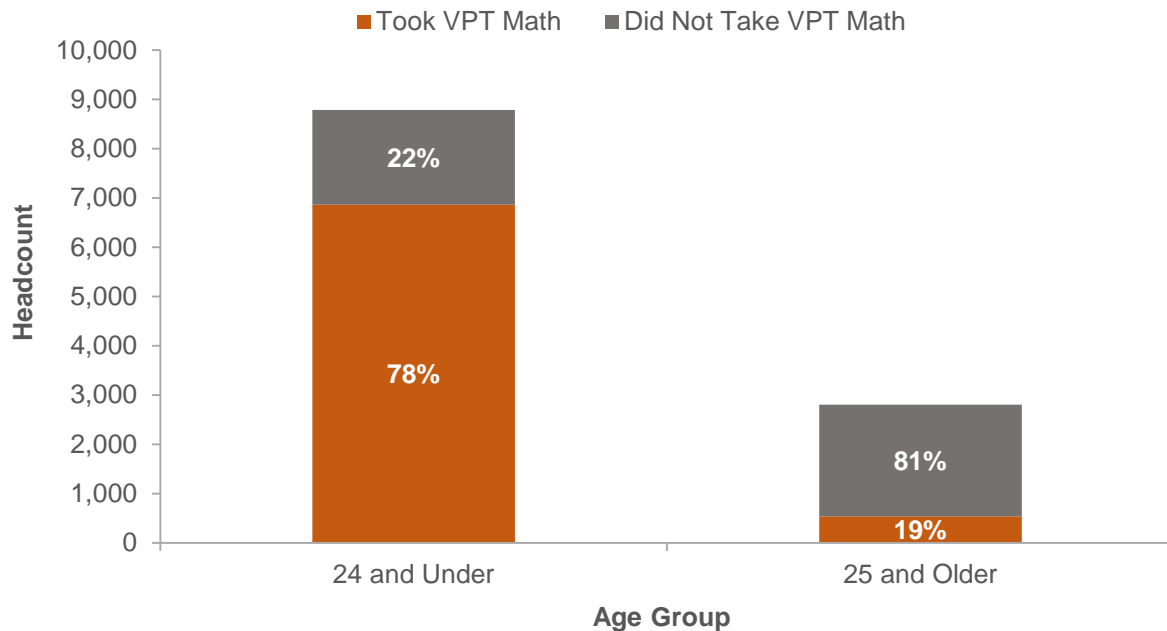
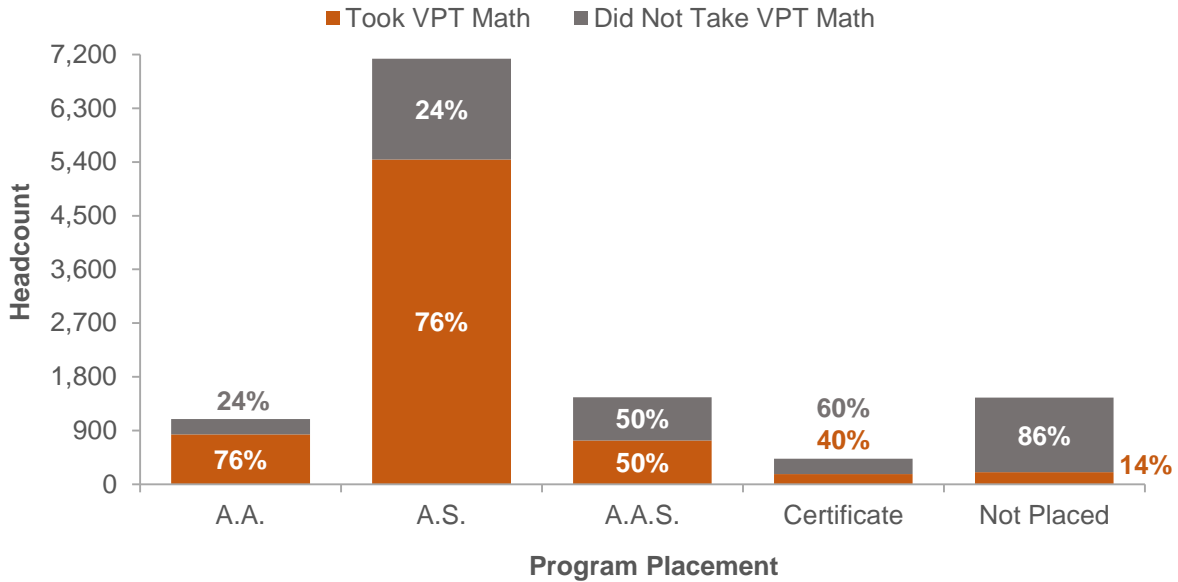


Figure 2, on the next page, shows that the majority of first-time to NOVA students were program-placed in an Associate of Science (A.S.) program.

- For students placed in A.S. or Associate of Arts (A.A.) programs, 76 percent took the math placement test prior to enrolling at NOVA; 24 percent did not take the test prior to enrolling.
- Half of students enrolled in Applied Associate of Science (A.A.S.) programs took the math placement test, and 40 percent of students enrolled in certificate programs took the test.
- Only 14 percent of students who were not placed in any academic program took the math placement test prior to enrolling at NOVA.

Figure 2. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort

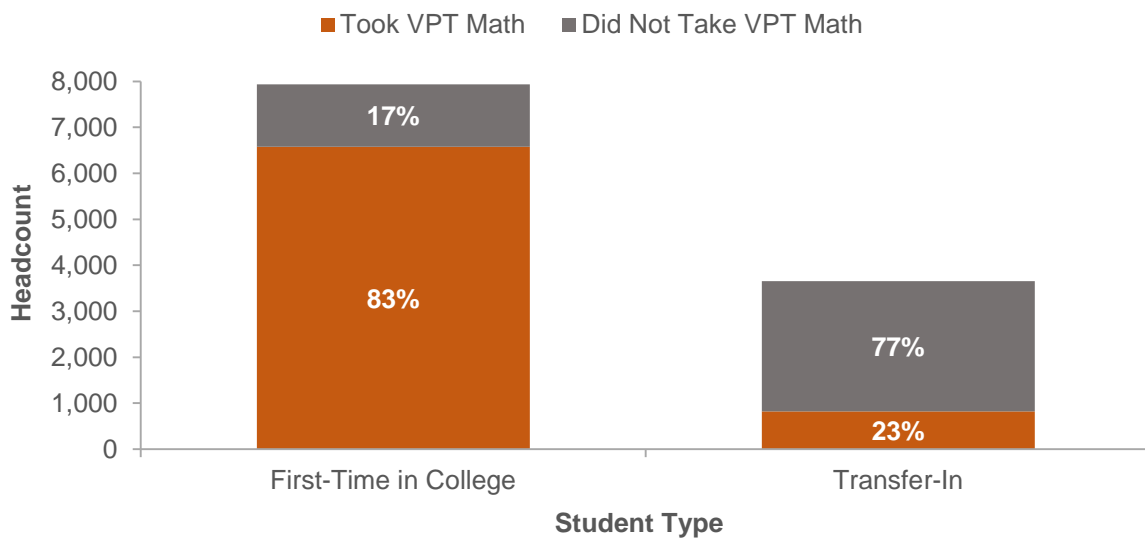


Note: The number of students placed in A.A.A. programs was too small to make valid comparisons; the data is included in the Appendix tables.

The majority of first-time to NOVA students were enrolled in college for the first time (first-time in college). (Figure 3)

- Of the first-time in college students, 83 percent took the math placement test.
- Only 23 percent of students who previously attended another college (transfer-in) took the math placement test prior to enrolling at NOVA for the first time.

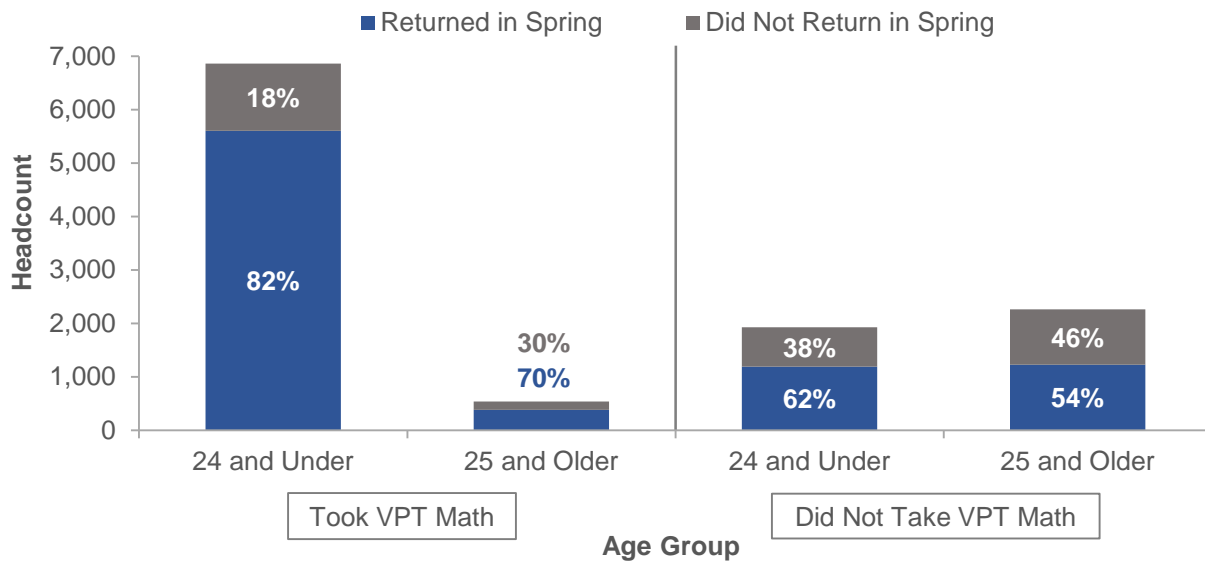
Figure 3. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort



Fall-to-Spring Retention

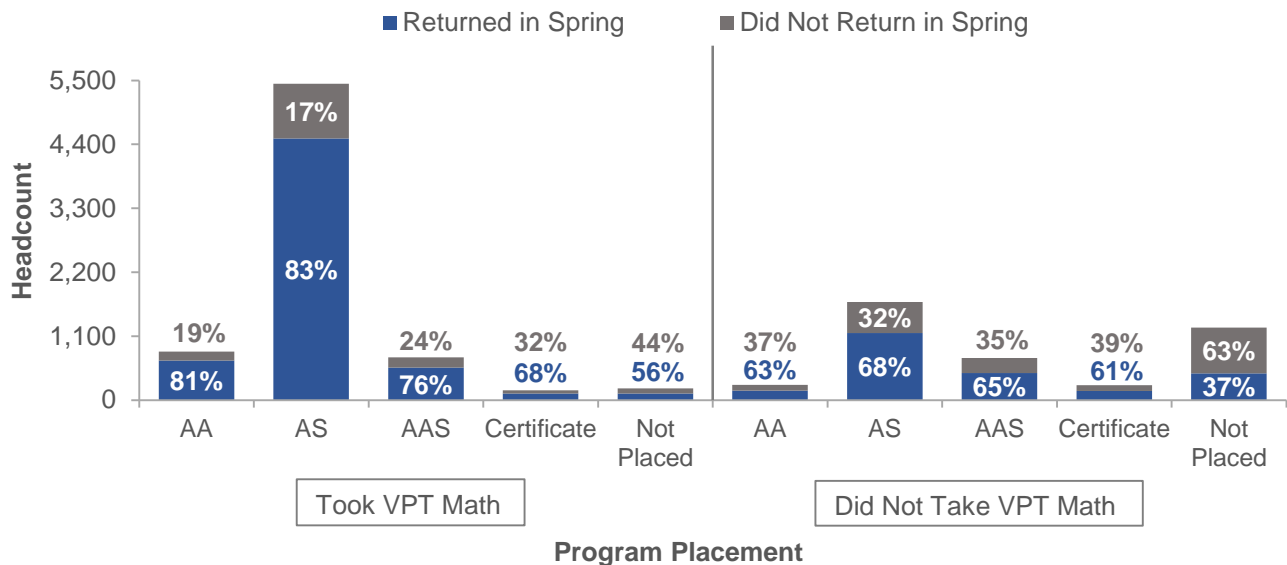
Of students aged 24 and under, those who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the spring semester at a rate 20 percentage points higher than those who did not take the test (82 versus 62 percent).

Figure 4. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort



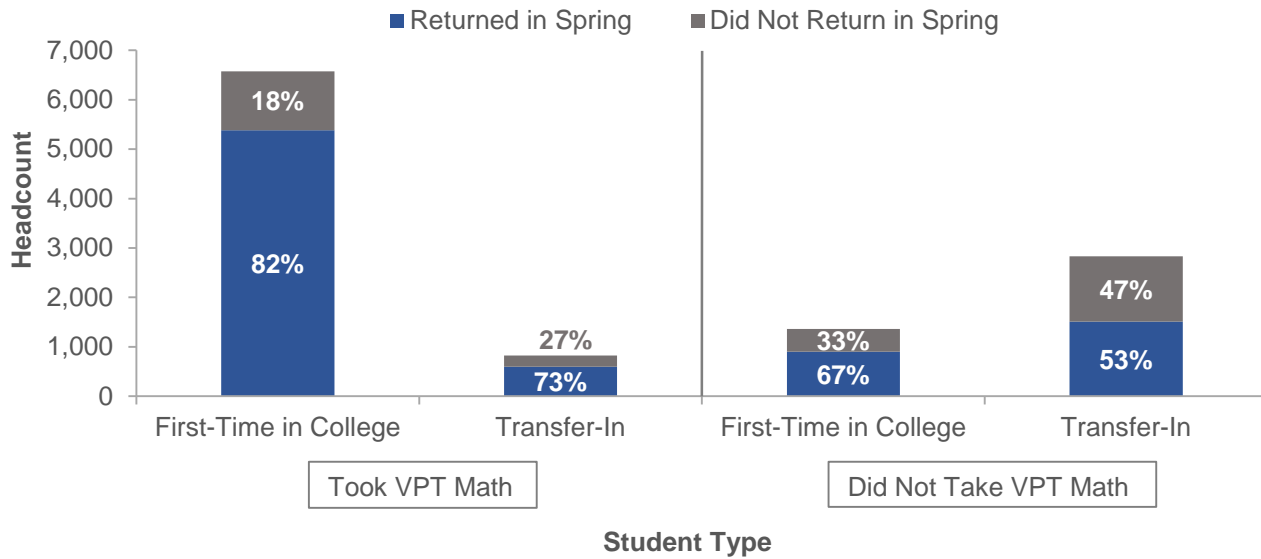
Of students enrolled in an A.S. program, those who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the spring semester at a rate 15 percentage points higher than A.S. students who did not take the placement test (83 versus 68 percent).

Figure 5. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort



First-time in college students who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the spring semester at a rate 15 percentage points higher than first-time in college students who did not take the placement test (82 versus 67 percent).

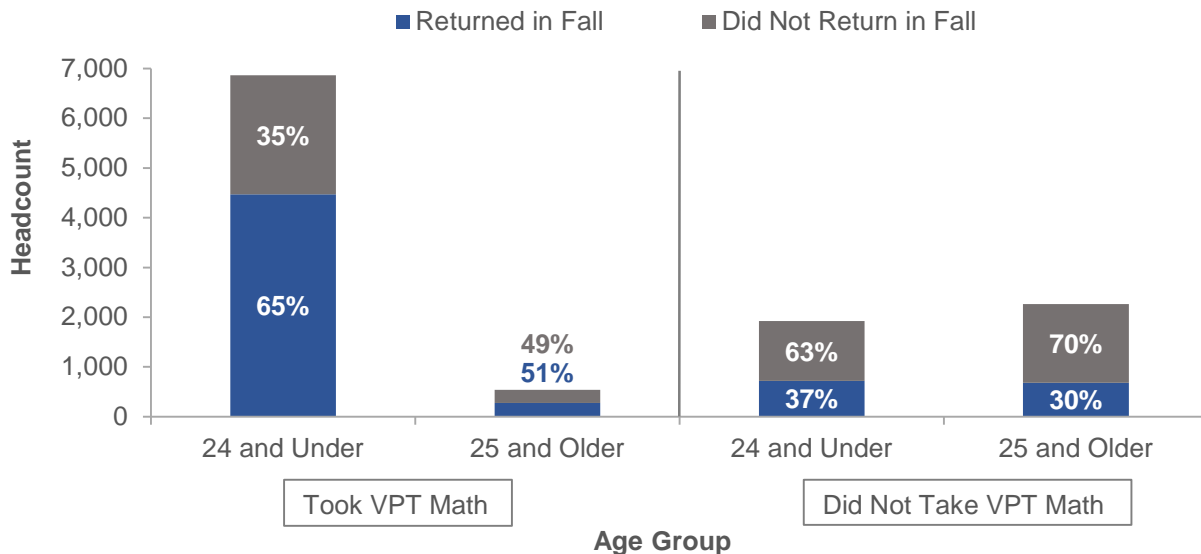
Figure 6. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort



Fall-to-Fall Retention

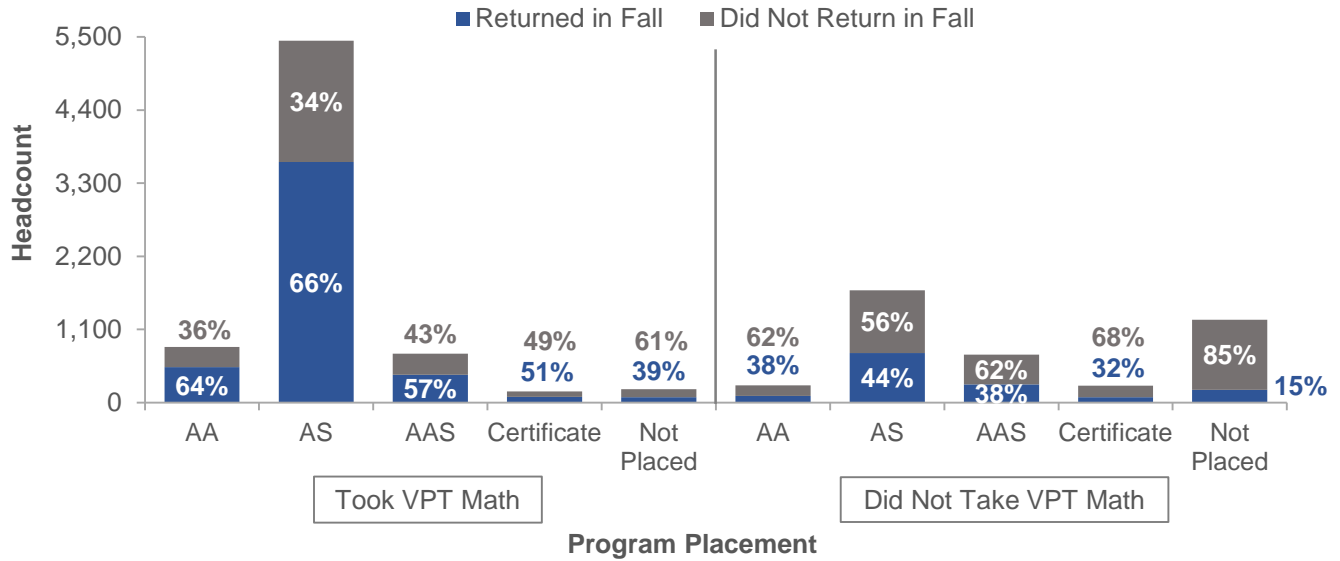
For students aged 24 and under, those who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the next fall semester at a rate 28 percentage points higher than those who did not take the test (65 versus 37 percent).

Figure 7. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort



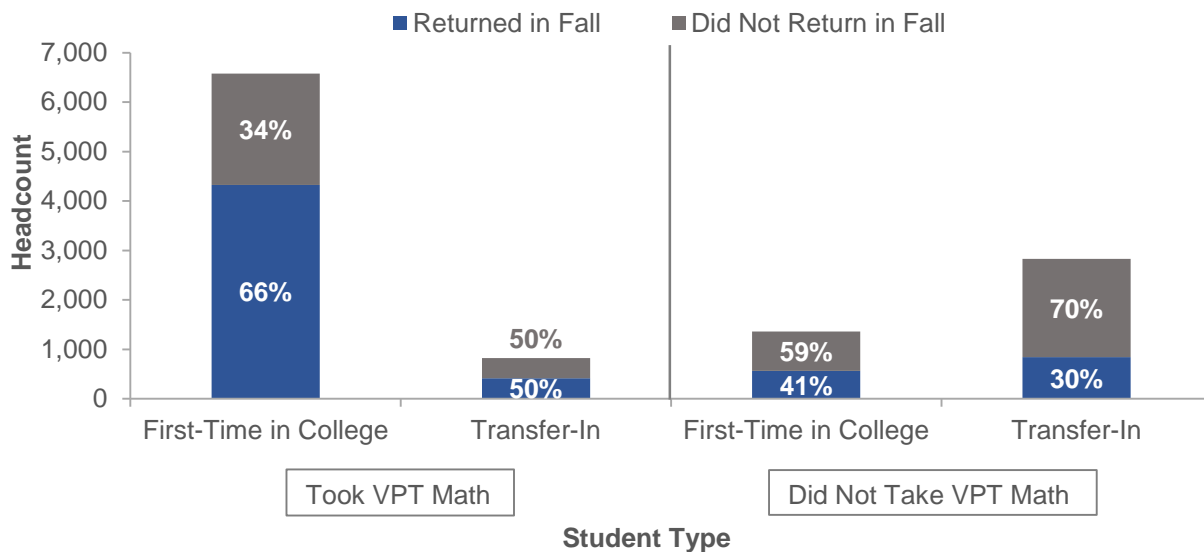
For students enrolled in an A.S. program, those who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the next fall semester at a rate 22 percentage points higher than A.S. students who did not take the placement test (66 versus 44 percent).

Figure 8. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort



First-time in college students who took the VPT Math returned to NOVA in the next fall semester at a rate 25 percentage points higher than first-time in college students who did not take the placement test (66 versus 41 percent).

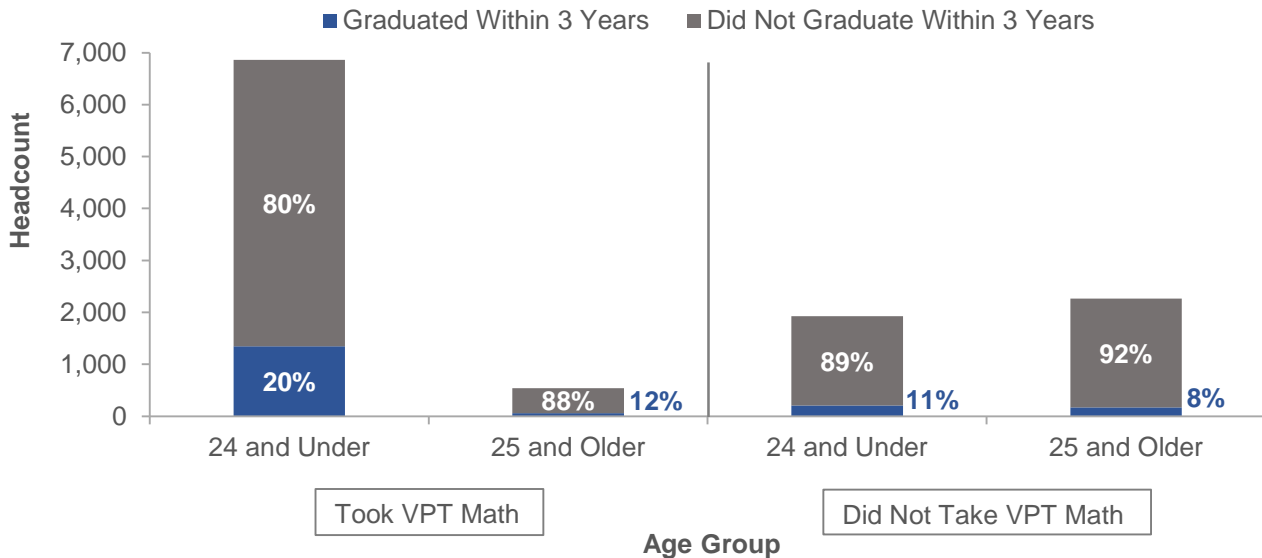
Figure 9. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort



Graduation within Three Years

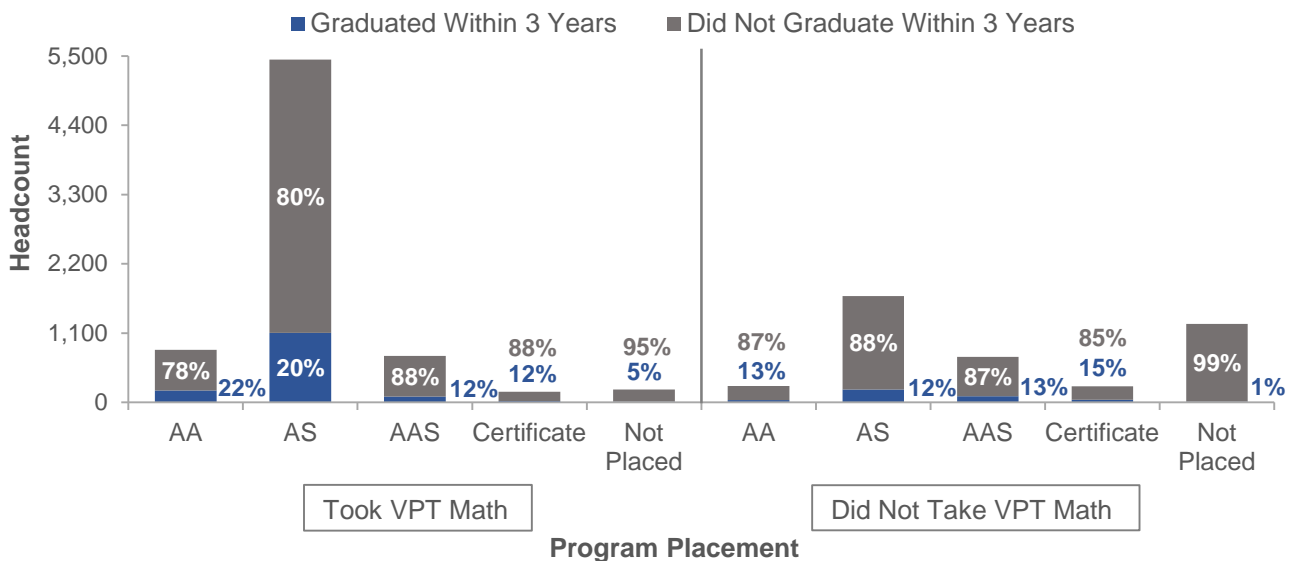
For students aged 24 and under, those who took the VPT Math graduated within three years at a rate nine percentage points higher than those who did not take the placement test (20 versus 11 percent).

Figure 10. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort



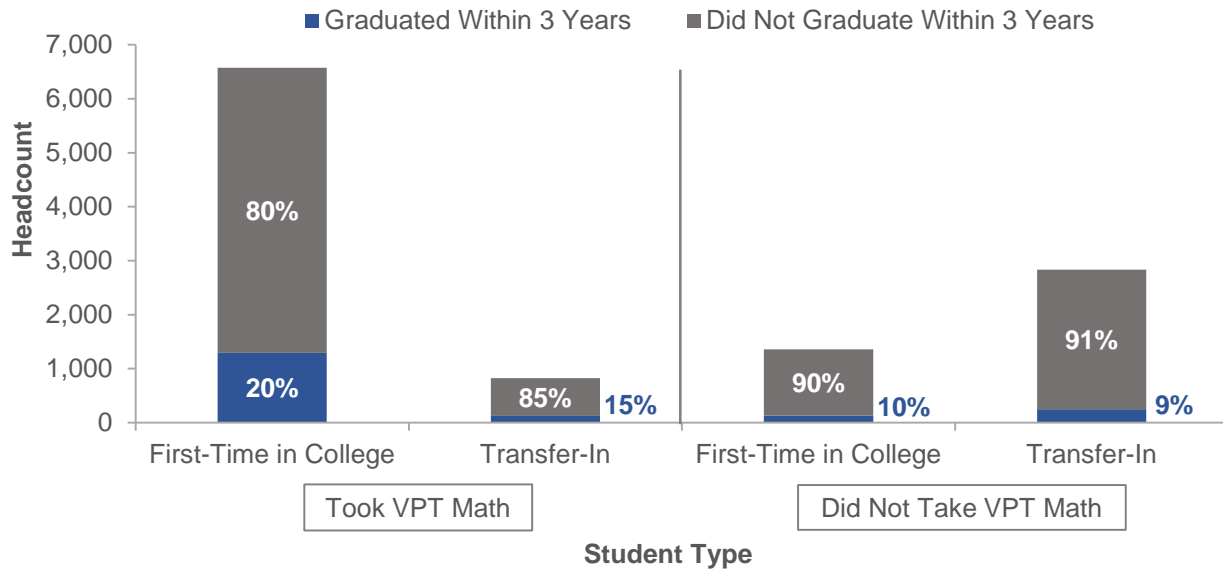
For students enrolled in an A.S. program, those who took the VPT Math graduated from NOVA within three years at a rate eight percentage points higher than A.S. students who did not take the placement test (20 versus 12 percent).

Figure 11. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort



First-time in college students who took the VPT Math graduated from NOVA within three years at a rate 10 percentage points higher than first-time in college students who did not take the placement test (20 versus 10 percent).

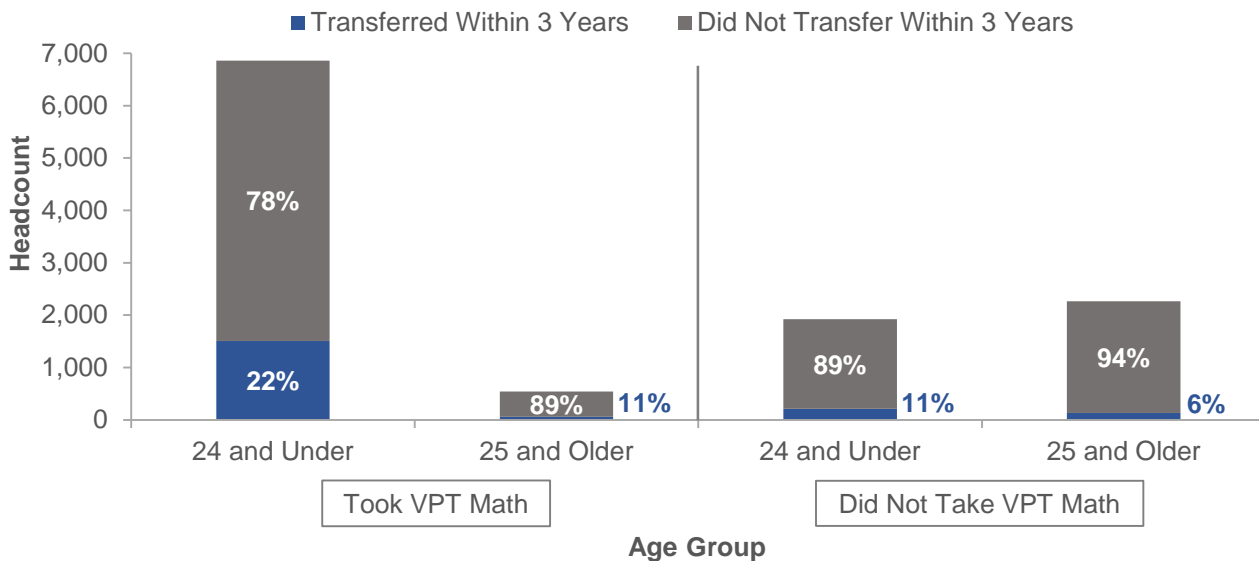
Figure 12. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort



Transfer within Three Years

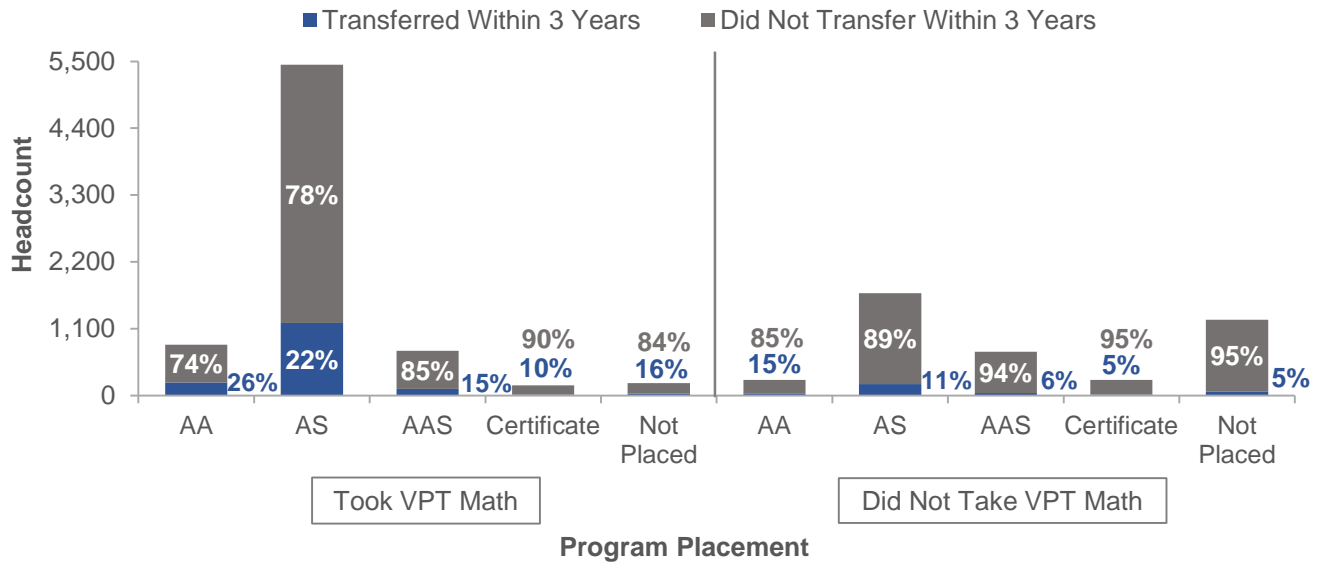
For students aged 24 and under, those who took the VPT Math transferred within three years at a rate 11 percentage points higher than those who did not take the placement test (22 versus 11 percent).

Figure 13. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort



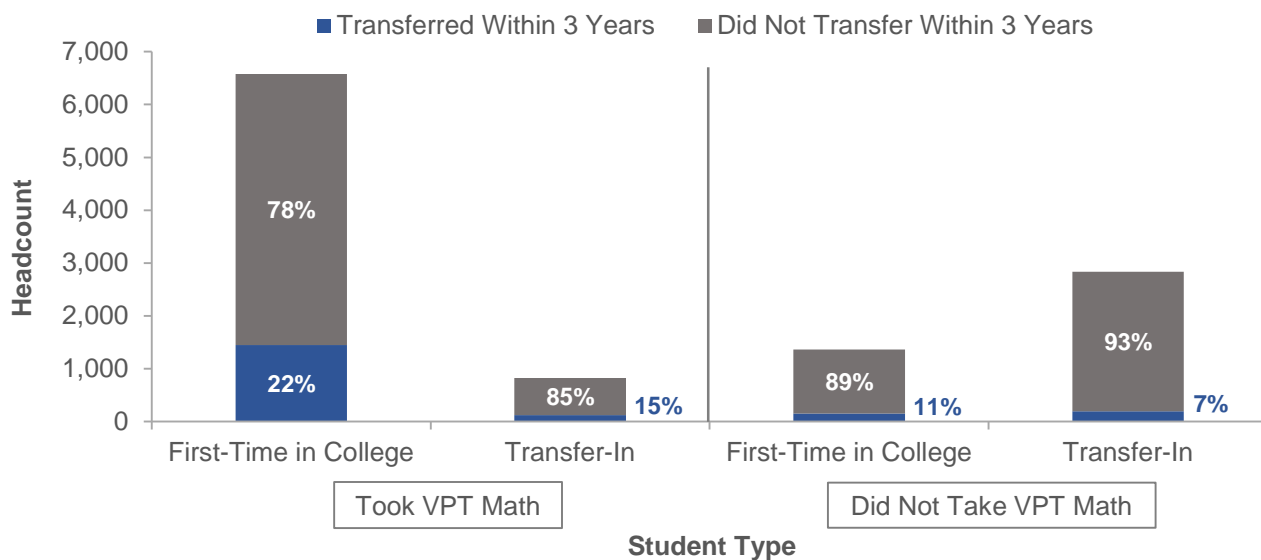
For students enrolled in an A.S. program, those who took the math placement test transferred from NOVA within three years at a rate 11 percentage points higher than A.S. students who did not take the placement test (22 versus 11 percent).

Figure 14. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort



First-time in college students who took the VPT Math transferred from NOVA within three years at a rate 11 percentage points higher than first-time in college students who did not take the placement test (22 versus 11 percent).

Figure 15. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort



Appendix: Data Tables

VPT Math Placement Testing

Table A1. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort

Age Group	Took VPT Math		Did Not Take VPT Math		Total
	#	%	#	%	
24 and Under	6,862	78%	1,925	22%	8,787
25 and Older	540	19%	2,266	81%	2,806
Total	7,402	64%	4,191	36%	11,593

Table A2. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort

Program Placement	Took VPT Math		Did Not Take VPT Math		Total
	#	%	#	%	
A.A.	835	76%	260	24%	1,095
A.S.	5,443	76%	1,687	24%	7,130
A.A.A.	16	47%	18	53%	34
A.A.S.	735	50%	723	50%	1,458
Certificate	170	40%	256	60%	426
Not Placed	203	14%	1,247	86%	1,450
Total	7,402	64%	4,191	36%	11,593

Table A3. Math Placement Testing of First-Time to NOVA Students by Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort

Student Type	Took VPT Math		Did Not Take VPT Math		Total
	#	%	#	%	
First-Time in College	6,577	83%	1,359	17%	7,936
Transfer-In	825	23%	2,832	77%	3,657
Total	7,402	64%	4,191	36%	11,593

Fall-to-Spring Retention

Table A4. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Age Group	Returned in Spring		Did Not Return in Spring		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	24 and Under	5,604	82%	1,258	18%	6,862
	25 and Older	380	70%	160	30%	540
Did Not Take VPT Math	24 and Under	1,189	62%	736	38%	1,925
	25 and Older	1,226	54%	1,040	46%	2,266
Total		8,399	72%	3,194	28%	11,593

Table A5. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Program Placement	Returned in Spring		Did Not Return in Spring		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	A.A.	679	81%	156	19%	835
	A.S.	4,504	83%	939	17%	5,443
	A.A.A.	14	88%	2	13%	16
	A.A.S.	558	76%	177	24%	735
	Certificate	115	68%	55	32%	170
	Not Placed	114	56%	89	44%	203
Did Not Take VPT Math	A.A.	165	63%	95	37%	260
	A.S.	1,154	68%	533	32%	1,687
	A.A.A.	14	78%	4	22%	18
	A.A.S.	468	65%	255	35%	723
	Certificate	156	61%	100	39%	256
	Not Placed	458	37%	789	63%	1,247
Total		8,399	72%	3,194	28%	11,593

Table A6. Fall-to-Spring Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Student Type	Returned in Spring		Did Not Return in Spring		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	First-Time in College	5,385	82%	1,192	18%	6,577
	Transfer-In	599	73%	226	27%	825
Did Not Take VPT Math	First-Time in College	905	67%	454	33%	1,359
	Transfer-In	1,510	53%	1,322	47%	2,832
Total		8,399	72%	3,194	28%	11,593

Fall-to-Fall Retention

Table A7. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Age Group	Returned in Fall		Did Not Return in Fall		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	24 and Under	4,468	65%	2,394	35%	6,862
	25 and Older	274	51%	266	49%	540
Did Not Take VPT Math	24 and Under	719	37%	1,206	63%	1,925
	25 and Older	683	30%	1,583	70%	2,266
Total		6,144	53%	5,449	47%	11,593

Table A8. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Program Placement	Returned in Fall		Did Not Return in Fall		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	A.A.	533	64%	302	36%	835
	A.S.	3,619	66%	1,824	34%	5,443
	A.A.A.	6	38%	10	63%	16
	A.A.S.	418	57%	317	43%	735
	Certificate	86	51%	84	49%	170
	Not Placed	80	39%	123	61%	203
Did Not Take VPT Math	A.A.	99	38%	161	62%	260
	A.S.	745	44%	942	56%	1,687
	A.A.A.	9	50%	9	50%	18
	A.A.S.	273	38%	450	62%	723
	Certificate	83	32%	173	68%	256
	Not Placed	193	15%	1,054	85%	1,247
Total		6,144	53%	5,449	47%	11,593

Table A9. Fall-to-Fall Retention of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Student Type	Returned in Fall		Did Not Return in Fall		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	First-Time in College	4,329	66%	2,248	34%	6,577
	Transfer-In	413	50%	412	50%	825
Did Not Take VPT Math	First-Time in College	561	41%	798	59%	1,359
	Transfer-In	841	30%	1,991	70%	2,832
Total		6,144	53%	5,449	47%	11,593

Three-Year Graduation Rates

Table A10. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Age Group	Graduated Within Three Years		Did Not Graduate Within Three Years		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	24 and Under	1,347	20%	5,515	80%	6,862
	25 and Older	63	12%	477	88%	540
Did Not Take VPT Math	24 and Under	207	11%	1,718	89%	1,925
	25 and Older	172	8%	2,094	92%	2,266
Total		1,789	15%	9,804	85%	11,593

Table A11. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Program Placement	Graduated Within Three Years		Did Not Graduate Within Three Years		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	A.A.	187	22%	648	78%	835
	A.S.	1,101	20%	4,342	80%	5,443
	A.A.A.	2	13%	14	88%	16
	A.A.S.	89	12%	646	88%	735
	Certificate	21	12%	149	88%	170
	Not Placed	10	5%	193	95%	203
Did Not Take VPT Math	A.A.	33	13%	227	87%	260
	A.S.	204	12%	1,483	88%	1,687
	A.A.A.	1	6%	17	94%	18
	A.A.S.	94	13%	629	87%	723
	Certificate	38	15%	218	85%	256
	Not Placed	9	1%	1,238	99%	1,247
Total		1,789	15%	9,804	85%	11,593

Table A12. Three-Year Graduation Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Student Type	Graduated Within Three Years		Did Not Graduate Within Three Years		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	First-Time in College	1,289	20%	5,288	80%	6,577
	Transfer-In	121	15%	704	85%	825
Did Not Take VPT Math	First-Time in College	131	10%	1,228	90%	1,359
	Transfer-In	248	9%	2,584	91%	2,832
Total		1,789	15%	9,804	85%	11,593

Three-Year Transfer Rates

Table A13. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Age Group: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Age Group	Transferred Within Three Years		Did Not Transfer Within Three Years		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	24 and Under	1,508	22%	5,354	78%	6,862
	25 and Older	61	11%	479	89%	540
Did Not Take VPT Math	24 and Under	211	11%	1,714	89%	1,925
	25 and Older	134	6%	2,132	94%	2,266
Total		1,914	17%	9,679	83%	11,593

Table A14. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Program Placement: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Program Placement	Transferred Within Three Years		Did Not Transfer Within Three Years		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	A.A.	214	26%	621	74%	835
	A.S.	1,196	22%	4,247	78%	5,443
	A.A.A.	1	6%	15	94%	16
	A.A.S.	109	15%	626	85%	735
	Certificate	17	10%	153	90%	170
	Not Placed	32	16%	171	84%	203
Did Not Take VPT Math	A.A.	39	15%	221	85%	260
	A.S.	188	11%	1,499	89%	1,687
	A.A.A.	0	0%	18	100%	18
	A.A.S.	41	6%	682	94%	723
	Certificate	13	5%	243	95%	256
	Not Placed	64	5%	1,183	95%	1,247
Total		1,914	17%	9,679	83%	11,593

Table A15. Three-Year Transfer Rates of First-Time to NOVA Students by Math Placement Testing and Student Type: Fall 2014 Cohort

VPT Math	Student Type	Transferred Within Three Years		Did Not Transfer Within Three Years		Total
		#	%	#	%	
Took VPT Math	First-Time in College	1,449	22%	5,128	78%	6,577
	Transfer-In	120	15%	705	85%	825
Did Not Take VPT Math	First-Time in College	153	11%	1,206	89%	1,359
	Transfer-In	192	7%	2,640	93%	2,832
Total		1,914	17%	9,679	83%	11,593

PATHWAY TO THE AMERICAN DREAM—NOVA'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2023

THE NOVA COMMITMENT

As its primary contributions to meeting the needs of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Northern Virginia Community College pledges to advance the social and economic mobility of its students while producing an educated citizenry for the 21st Century.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To deliver on this commitment NOVA will focus its creativity and talent, its effort and energy, and its resources and persistence, on achieving three overarching goals—success, achievement, and prosperity. It will strive to enable **Every Student to Succeed, Every Program to Achieve, and Every Community to Prosper.**

To advance the completion agenda described above, thereby promoting students' success and enhancing their social mobility, ensuring that programs achieve, and producing an educated citizenry for the 21st Century, the following goals and objectives are adopted:

GOAL 1: Every Student Succeeds

- **Objective 1:** Develop a College-wide approach to advising that ensures all students are advised and have access to support throughout their time at NOVA
- **Objective 2:** Implement VIP-PASS System as the foundational technology based on NOVA Informed Pathways for student self-advising, assignment and coordination of advisors, and course registration

GOAL 2: Every Program Achieves

- **Objective 3:** Develop comprehensive, fully integrated Informed Pathways for every program to ensure seamless transitions from high school and other entry points to NOVA, and from NOVA to four-year transfer institutions or the workforce
- **Objective 4:** Develop effective processes and protocols for programmatic College-wide collective decisions that include consistent, accountable leadership and oversight of each academic program with designated "owners," active advisory committees, clear student learning outcomes and assessments, and program reviews in all modalities of instruction
- **Objective 5:** Align NOVA's organizational structures, position descriptions, and expectations for accountability with its overarching mission to support student engagement, learning, success and institutional effectiveness

GOAL 3: Every Community Prospers

- **Objective 6:** Enhance the prosperity of every community in Northern Virginia by refocusing and prioritizing NOVA's workforce development efforts
- **Objective 7:** Further develop NOVA's IT and Cybersecurity programs to support regional job demand and position NOVA as the leading IT community college in the nation
- **Objective 8:** Re-envision workforce strategies and integrate workforce development into a NOVA core focus
- **Objective 9:** Plan to expand the breadth and reach of NOVA's healthcare and biotechnology programs, and prioritize future programs to support regional economic development goals economic development goals

NOVA

**Northern Virginia
Community College**

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