

**RESEARCH BRIEF**

**NOVA Student Transfers:  
First Time in College and Summer Transient Students**

**Introduction**

College students often follow complicated and indirect pathways to degree attainment. Students may begin their initial enrollment at a two-year or a four-year institution and transfer between institution types many times before attaining a degree. Nationwide, 37 percent of Fall 2011 first-time in college (FTIC) students who began at a two-year public institution transferred to another institution at least once within their first six years. Among these student transfers, only 15 percent transferred after earning a two-year degree or certificate.

This research brief explores transfer behaviors of NOVA students in comparison to nationwide trends reported by the National Student Clearinghouse. Data and results focus on FTIC students from the Fall 2011 cohort and report on transfer behaviors that occur within six years of their initial enrollment. Comparisons highlight various student transfer pathways and offer insight into transfer behaviors among FTIC students. Findings reveal opportunities for addressing NOVA student transfer pathways and behaviors.

***Key Findings***

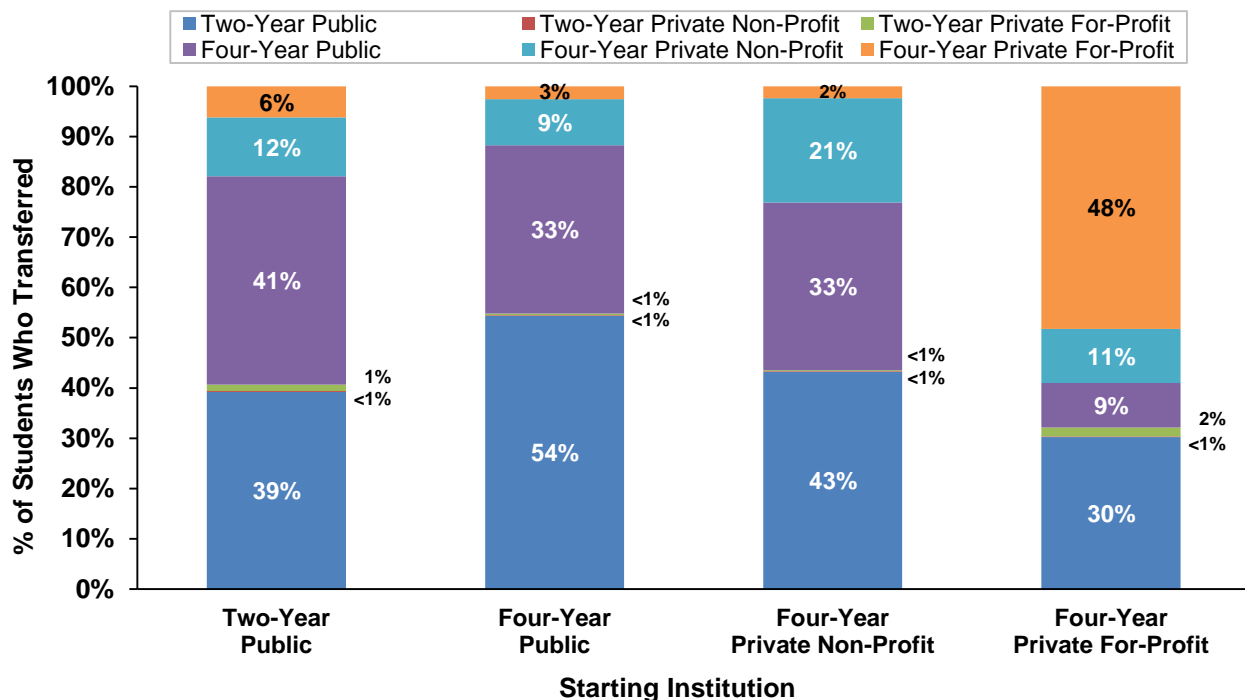
- The percentage of NOVA's Fall 2011 FTIC students who ***transferred with a two-year degree or certificate was three times greater (47% versus 15%)*** than the national average.
- The percentage of NOVA's Fall 2011 FTIC students who ***transferred to a four-year institution was significantly greater (88% versus 59%)*** than the national average.
- The proportion of ***lateral transfers*** among NOVA's Fall 2011 FTIC students was ***three times lower (12% versus 41%)*** than the national average.
- Among NOVA's Fall 2011 FTIC students who transferred, ***19 percent earned 60 or more credit hours at NOVA but did not complete a two-year degree or certificate.***
- The proportion of ***summer transient students*** at NOVA has ***increased steadily over the last five years.***
- ***Summer transient students*** at NOVA were ***almost twice as likely to enroll exclusively in ELI courses*** when compared to non-transient students.

## Overview of Student Transfers Nationwide

The National Student Clearinghouse reports<sup>1</sup> that almost two-fifths (37 percent) of Fall 2011 cohort FTIC students who began at a two-year institution transferred at least once within their first six years. Although the majority of these students (59 percent) transferred to four-year institutions, 41 percent were *lateral transfers*, meaning that they left one two-year institution to enroll in another two-year institution (Figure 1).

Simultaneously, about half (51 percent) of Fall 2011 cohort FTIC students who began at a four-year institution transferred to a two-year institution at least once within their first six years. Those who started at a four-year public institution or a four-year private non-profit institution were most likely to transfer to a two-year public institution (54% and 43%, respectively). Many of these transfers from four-year institutions (36 percent) were students who enrolled at a two-year institution during the summer and subsequently returned to their four-year institution. Students with this type of transfer behavior are often referred to as *summer swirlers* or *summer transient students*.

**Figure 1. First Transfer Destination among Fall 2011 Cohort FTIC Students**



Source: National Student Clearinghouse (<https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Signature-Report-15.pdf>)

Overall, student transfers did not vary greatly by race/ethnicity, however, larger variations occurred by enrollment status and student age. Transferring was most common among students with mixed enrollment patterns (i.e., had both full-time and part-time enrollments). These students were almost twice as likely to transfer than exclusively full-time students (51% compared to 29%) and more than four times as likely to transfer than exclusively part-time students (51% compared to 12%). In addition, students who were under the age of 21 were more than twice as likely to transfer than those who were ages 21 years or older (45% versus 21%).

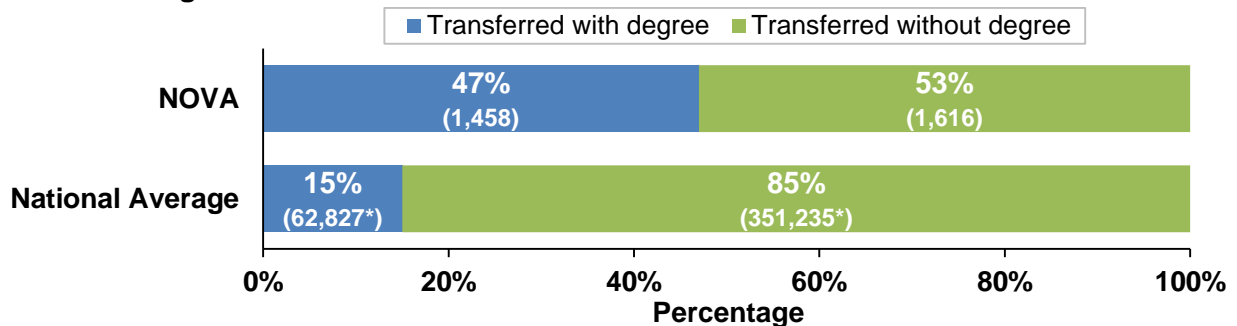
## Section I. FTIC Student Transfers from NOVA: Fall 2011 Cohort

More than two-fifths (43 percent) of NOVA's FTIC students from the Fall 2011 cohort transferred from NOVA to another postsecondary institution within their first six years. This 43 percent transfer rate was 6 points higher than the national average of 37 percent (Table 1). Among transfers from NOVA, 47 percent earned their two-year degree or certificate prior to transferring (Figure 2). Thus, NOVA students were three times as likely to transfer with a two-year degree or certificate when compared to the national average (47% versus 15%).

**Table 1. Transfer Rate among FTIC Students from Two-Year Public Institutions**

NOVA	National Average
<b>43% Transfer Rate</b>	<b>37% Transfer Rate</b>
(3,074 out of 7,233)	(414,062 out of 1,121,916)

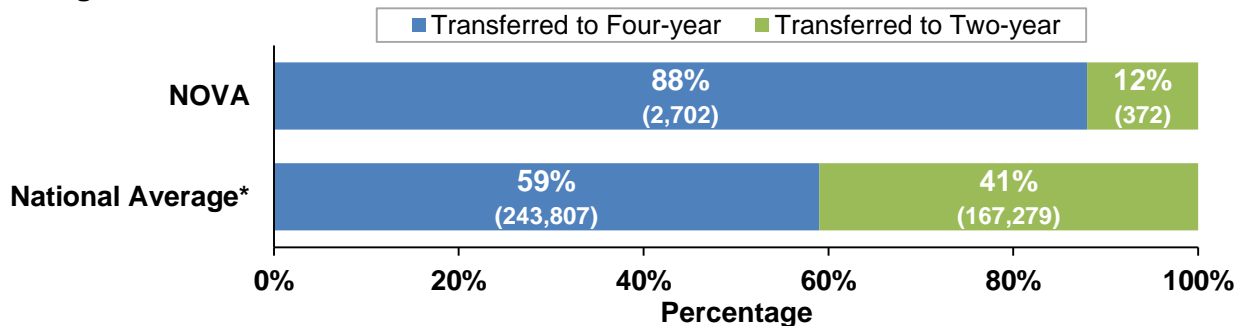
**Figure 2. FTIC Student Transfers from Two-Year Public Institutions**



\*Figures are estimated as only percentages were provided from source (<https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Signature-Report-15.pdf>)

NOVA's FTIC students from the Fall 2011 cohort were also more likely to transfer to a four-year institution (Figure 3) when compared to the national average (88% versus 59%). In the same vein, NOVA's FTIC students from the Fall 2011 cohort were less likely to transfer to another two-year institution (12% versus 41%). Therefore, lateral transfer among FTIC students was three times less likely to occur at NOVA when compared to the national average.

**Figure 3. FTIC Student First Transfer Destination from Two-Year Public Institutions**



\*Total transfers equal 411,068 instead of 414,062 (as reported in Table 1) due to National Student Clearinghouse's methodological exclusions.

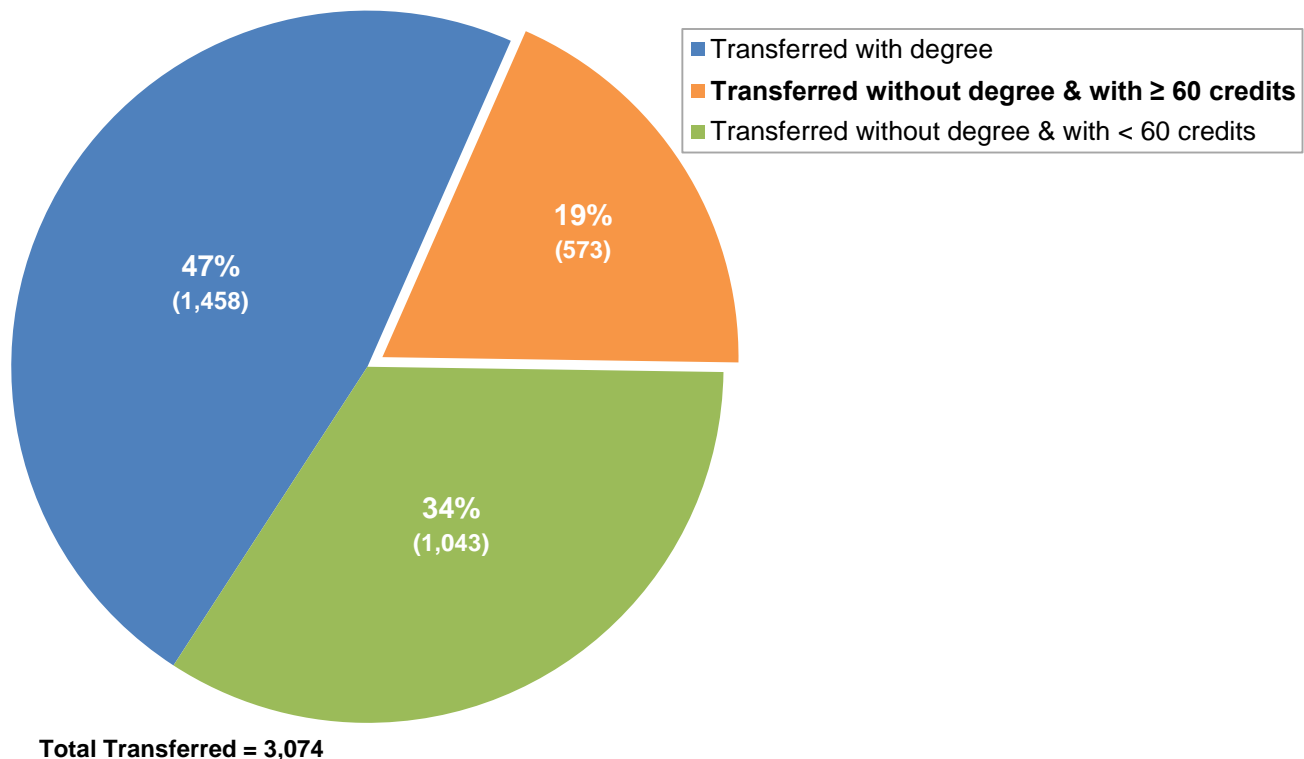
### Reasons for FTIC Students Transferring from NOVA

A recent qualitative study of NOVA FTIC students<sup>ii</sup> found that among those who transferred to four-year institutions without earning a two-year degree or certificate, more than half (57 percent) enrolled at NOVA with the intention of only staying for one or two semesters. These students did not aspire to earn a two-year degree before transferring to a four-year institution. Their reasons for transferring prior to earning a two-year degree at NOVA included wanting to take courses/prerequisites at NOVA to lessen future course load, boost GPA, and/or save money. The remaining 43 percent who transferred without earning a two-year degree or certificate *did* intend to earn a two-year degree or certificate but transferred prior to doing so. Their reasons for transferring without earning a degree included having issues with low academic rigor, course availability, and the high number of prerequisites required to earn certain two-year degrees.

### Credit Hours Earned among NOVA FTIC Student Transfers

Further examination of transfers from NOVA's Fall 2011 FTIC cohort revealed that nearly one-fifth (19 percent) of these students transferred without a degree even after having earned at least 60 credit hours. This suggests that a sizable portion of students who transferred from NOVA had enough or very close to enough credit hours to earn a two-year degree (Figure 4).

Figure 4. NOVA FTIC Student Transfers by Credit Hours Earned: Fall 2011 Cohort

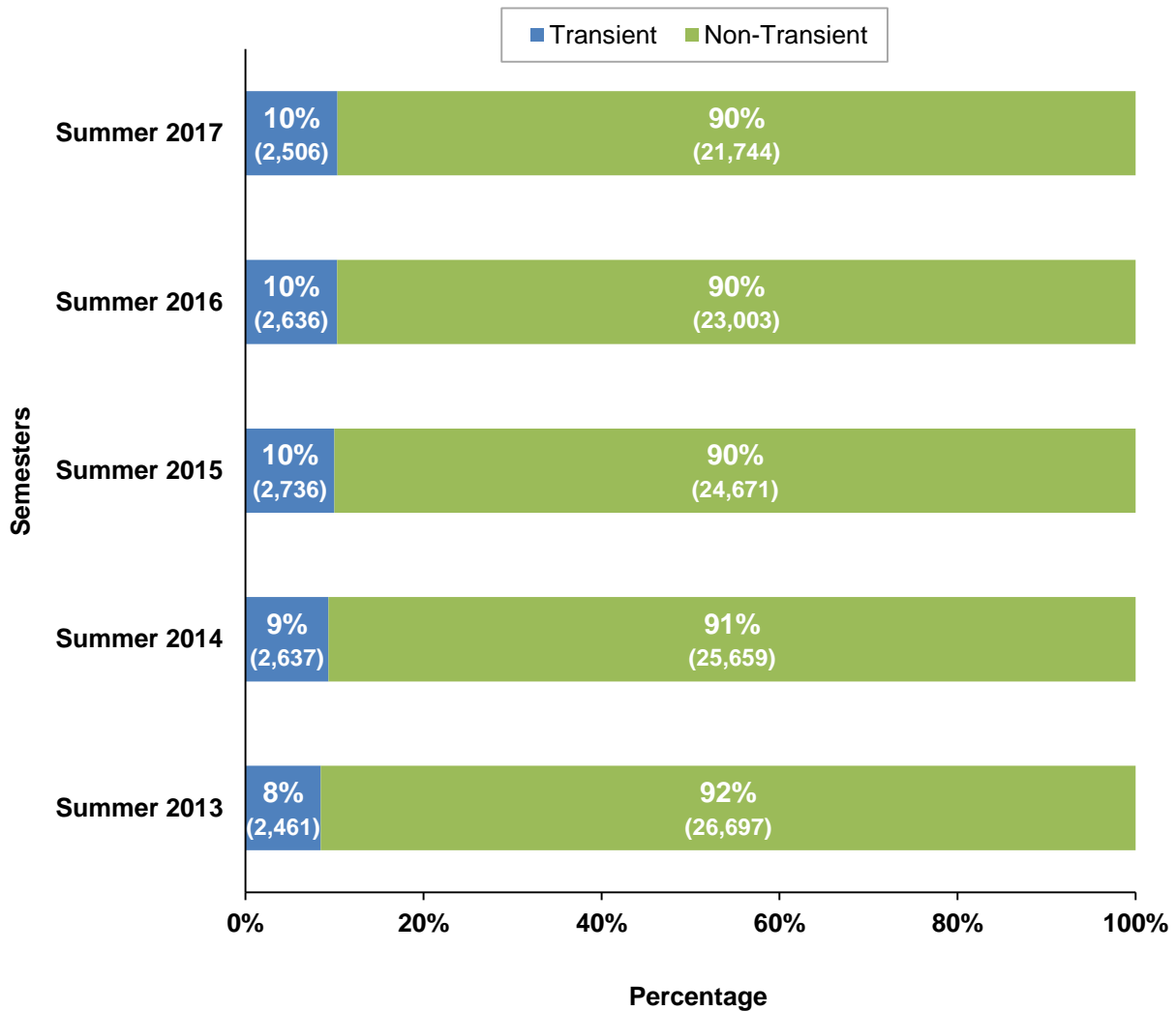


## Section II. Transfers to NOVA: Summer Transient Students

Nationwide, more than one-third (36 percent) of FTIC students who transferred from four-year institutions were summer transient students. These students are often referred to as “summer swirlers” due to their practice of enrolling at a two-year institution during the summer and subsequently returning to their four-year institution. Summer swirl transfer behavior is correlated with student success outcomes in the form of higher rates of baccalaureate degree attainment and shorter time-to-degree completion.<sup>iii</sup>

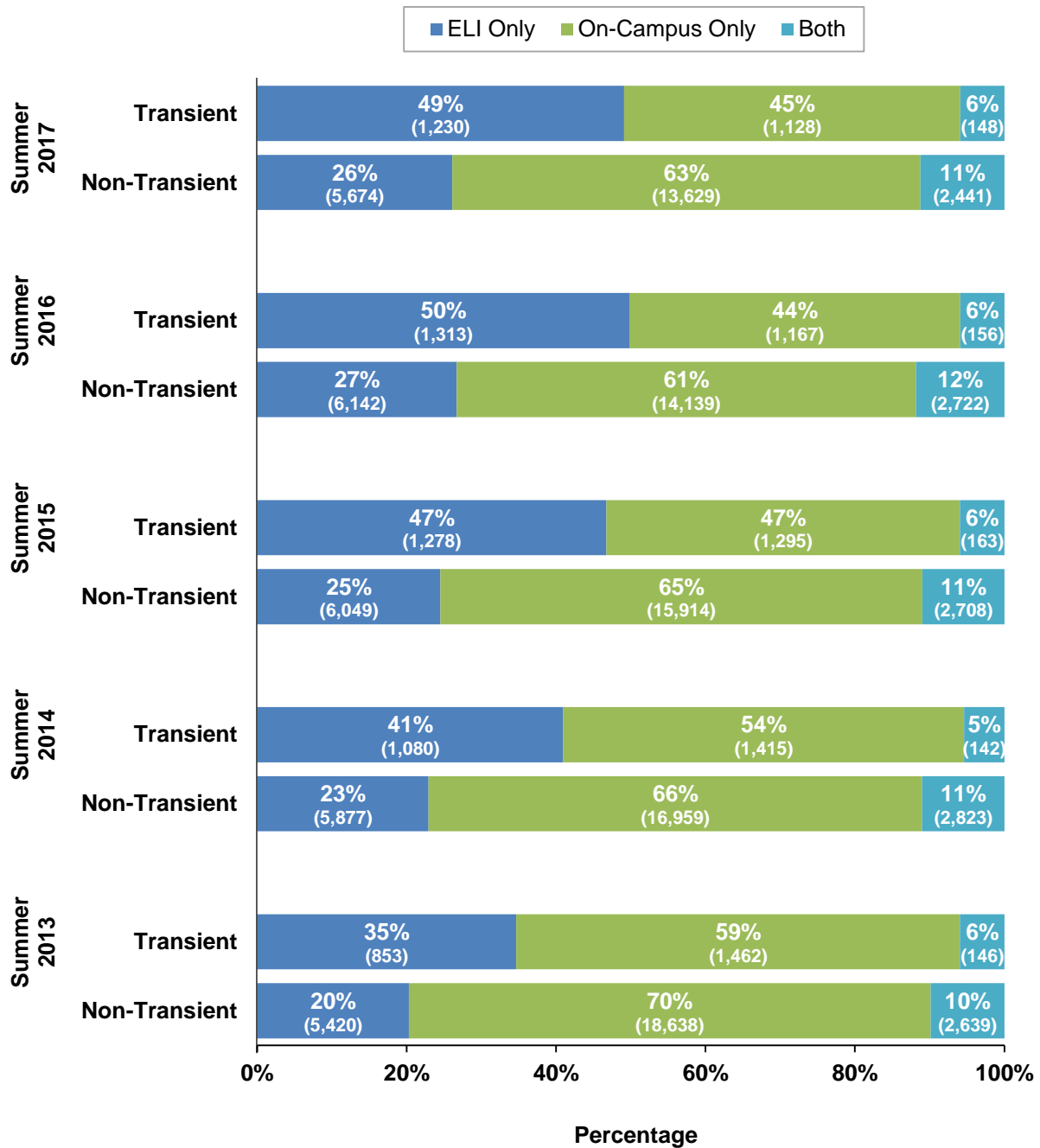
At NOVA, summer swirl transfer behavior can be captured through the examination of NOVA’s summer transient student enrollment. In recent years, the proportion of summer transient students at NOVA has increased slightly from 8 percent of headcount during Summer 2013 to 10 percent of headcount during Summer 2017.

**Figure 5. NOVA Summer Enrollment by Transient Student Status**



Among NOVA’s summer transient students, enrollment exclusively in Extended Learning Institute (ELI) courses increased from 35 percent in Summer 2013 to 49 percent in Summer 2017 (Figure 6). This illustrates a 14 point increase among transient students. Over the same time period, non-transient students experienced only a 6 point increase in the proportion of students electing to exclusively enroll in ELI courses. During this timeframe, NOVA’s summer transient students were nearly twice as likely as non-transient students to enroll exclusively in ELI courses.

**Figure 6. Summer Enrollment Course Modality by Transient Student Status**



### Section III. Discussion of Findings

Student transfer behavior reveals pathways toward two-year and four-year degree attainment. Examination of these behaviors offers opportunities to implement strategies that foster student success and assist students in achieving their academic goals. This research brief details transfer behavior among NOVA's first-time in college (FTIC) students (i.e., transfer-outs) and analyzes summer transient student patterns (i.e., transfer-ins).

Transfer behaviors among FTIC students at NOVA are more favorable than national trends. ***NOVA FTIC students are not only more likely to transfer when compared to the national average, but when they do so, they are more likely to transfer to four-year institutions and more likely to transfer with a two-year degree or certificate.*** These outcomes provide evidence of student success at NOVA. ***However, there is still room for improvement as a sizeable portion of NOVA students are transferring prior to earning their two-year degree, many of which have close to enough credit hours to complete an award.***

Given these findings, further investigation of NOVA transfers to four-year institutions is warranted to determine whether these students complete a four-year degree and the length time that it typically takes to complete that degree. Understanding this population of students may help NOVA to develop strategies for assisting and encouraging more students to complete a two-year degree at NOVA prior to transferring. Such strategies would also help students to complete their four-year degree requirements more quickly.

Possible strategies include supporting both associate and baccalaureate degree completion by promoting *concurrent enrollment* at NOVA (i.e., continuing enrollment at NOVA even while enrolled at a four-year institution) and advising students on *reverse transfer*<sup>iii</sup> options (i.e., satisfying two-year degree requirements at NOVA while enrolled at a four-year institution). These strategies may benefit students by enabling them to continue to reap the cost benefits of enrollment at a two-year institution while effectively reducing their time-to-degree completion.

NOVA already experiences concurrent enrollment transfer behavior through transient student enrollments or summer swirl. Summer transient students at NOVA take courses while maintaining their primary enrollment at another institution—many of these students are enrolled full-time at a four-year institution. Findings suggest that the summer transient student enrollment proportion at NOVA is increasing, and that summer course modality preference among transient students differs from non-transient students. With a growing proportion of summer transient students at NOVA, it is important to understand course enrollment patterns among this emerging population in an effort to better accommodate and encourage this type of transfer behavior.

In summary, student transfer pathways are highly utilized by first-time in college students aspiring toward baccalaureate degree attainment and are especially important to those who begin at two-year institutions. Enacting strategies that support favorable transfer behaviors and assist students on their academic journey may positively impact NOVA student success.

## Appendix

**Table A1. First Transfer Destination among Fall 2011 Cohort FTIC Students: Nationwide**

Starting Institution	First Transfer Destination Institution											
	Two-year public		Two-year private, non-profit		Two-year private, for-profit		Four-year public		Four-year private, non-profit		Four-year private, for-profit	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Two-year public	161,186	39.2	846	0.2	5,247	1.3	170,072	41.4	48,167	11.7	25,568	6.2
Four-year public	221,492	54.4	459	0.1	1,447	0.4	136,311	33.5	37,286	9.2	10,530	2.6
Four-year private non-profit	76,758	43.2	253	0.1	321	0.2	59,263	33.4	36,869	20.8	4,253	2.4
Four-year private for-profit	8,644	30.3	30	0.1	514	1.8	2,525	8.8	3,062	10.7	13,798	48.0

Source: National Student Clearinghouse (<https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Signature-Report-15.pdf>)

**Table A2. FTIC Student Transfers from Two-Year Public Institutions: Fall 2011 Cohort**

Transfer-out Behaviors	NOVA		National Average	
	#	%	#	%
Transferred with a two-year degree or certificate	1,458	47.4	62,827*	15.2
Transferred without earning a two-year degree or certificate	1,616	52.6	351,235*	84.8
Transferred to a four-year institution	2,702	87.9	243,807	59.3
Transferred to a two-year institution	372	12.1	167,279	40.7

\*Figures are estimated as only percentages were provided from source (<https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Signature-Report-15.pdf>)

**Table A3. NOVA Summer Enrollment by Transient Student Status**

	Summer 2013		Summer 2014		Summer 2015		Summer 2016		Summer 2017	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Transient students	2,461	8.4	2,637	9.3	2,736	10.0	2,636	10.3	2,506	10.3
Non-Transient students	26,697	91.6	25,659	90.7	24,671	90.0	23,003	89.7	21,744	89.7

**Table A4. Summer Enrollment Course Modality Proportions by Transient Student Status**

Transients students	Summer 2013		Summer 2014		Summer 2015		Summer 2016		Summer 2017	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
ELI only	853	34.7	1,080	41.0	1,278	46.7	1,313	49.8	1,230	49.1
On-Campus only	1,462	59.4	1,415	53.7	1,295	47.3	1,167	44.3	1,128	45.0
Both ELI and On-Campus	146	5.9	142	5.4	163	6.0	156	5.9	148	5.9
Non-Transients students	Summer 2013		Summer 2014		Summer 2015		Summer 2016		Summer 2017	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
ELI only	5,420	20.3	5,877	22.9	6,049	24.5	6,142	26.7	5,674	26.1
On-Campus only	18,638	69.8	16,959	66.1	15,914	64.5	14,139	61.5	13,629	62.7
Both ELI and On-Campus	2,639	9.9	2,823	11.0	2,708	11.0	2,722	11.8	2,441	11.2

<sup>i</sup> Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P.K., Bhimdiwali, A., Nathan, A., & Youngsik, H. (2018, July). Transfer and Mobility: National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2011 Cohort (Signature Report No. 15). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

<sup>ii</sup> Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success. (2017, December). Research Brief: Transfer Trends and Patterns. NOVA. Retrieved from [https://www.nvcc.edu/oier/\\_files/81-16TransferTrendsandPatterns.pdf](https://www.nvcc.edu/oier/_files/81-16TransferTrendsandPatterns.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Hossler, D., Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Ziskin, M., Chen, J., Zerquera, D., & Torres, V. (2012, July). Reverse transfer: A national view of student mobility from four-year to two-year institutions (Signature Report No.3). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.