RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 16-17   March 2017

Start Strong On-Time Registration Policy Summary

I. General Introduction

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.

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.

The focus of this summary is Policy 6: Mandatory On-Time Registration. The on-time registration policy was introduced in response to an accumulation of research finding that students who miss class in the early part of the semester do not perform as well as students who are in attendance from the first day of the class.

NOVA's on-time registration policy states that students must register for courses by 11:59 p.m. on the day before the session starts; however, the practical implementation of the policy has changed over time. The primary reason for implementing the policy was to ensure that students do not miss the first day of a class. As such, a student who registers after the 11:59 p.m. deadline but before the actual first meeting of the class can still be considered in compliance with the spirt of the policy. For the purposes of this Report, compliance with the on-time registration policy is determined by whether or not a

student missed the first class meeting. The first section of this Report examines compliance with the on-time registration policy. Section 2 compares the student success outcomes of students who complied with the policy against those who did not comply.

II. Background

In 2012, after the accreditation visit, NOVA's newly reconstituted ATD Core Team initiated a policy audit with the purpose of identifying policies and practices that seem to function as barriers to student success. As part of this initiative, extensive student focus groups were conducted at all the campuses. Using the student focus groups as a basis for discussion, the ATD Campus Teams identified several policies/practices that needed change in order to improve student success at NOVA. One of them was elimination of late registration. Reviewing the data at that time, the ATD Team recognized that the number of students registering late for classes was steadily increasing over time and had reached approximately 12-15 percent of students registering late per semester. In addition to this increasing trend, more and more students were delaying the registration by as much as two weeks which equates to missing roughly four classes at the beginning of the semester. By 2013, when the ATD Team made the decision to recommend on-time registration at NOVA, College-wide late registration was 11 percent.

III. 2014 Implementation of Start Strong Policy

In 2013, the Administrative Council approved the Start Strong Policy Change Implementation and funded the project for implementation in Fall 2014. The Policy Change Implementation (PCI) Team defined on-time registration as no student missing his/her first class in the course. Given this expectation, the policy was all students need to register by 11:59PM before the first day of class. Though the PCI realized that classes starting a few days after the session begins students should be allowed to register during the first week for those classes. However, PeopleSoft could not accommodate this feature due to technical difficulties. When the implementation began in Fall 2014, Academic Deans gave approval for registration for classes started during the later part of the week.

IV. Data

A. Compliance Data: Following implementation of the on-time registration policy, the percentage of students who registered on-time increased from 89 percent in Fall 2013 to 98 percent in Fall 2014. Non-compliance with the on-time registration policy increased slightly after initial implementation, from under 3 percent in Fall 2014 to 4 percent in Fall 2016.

Table 1. Compliance with On-Time Registration Policy: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016

Compliance*	Fall 2013 (Pre-Policy)		Fall 2014		Fall 2015		Fall 2016	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Registered On-Time	38,005	89.3	38,487	97.5	39,972	96.4	37,749	96.0
Did Not Comply	4,562	10.7	986	2.5	1,477	3.6	1,576	4.0
Total Unduplicated Headcount	**42,567**	**100.0**	**39,473**	**100.0**	**41,449**	**100.0**	**39,325**	**100.0**

*Dynamic session courses are excluded from determination of compliance. "Total Unduplicated Headcount" is lower than fall enrollment each term due to the exclusion of students who were enrolled only in courses in the Dynamic session.

B. Outcome Data 2013 through 2016: In Fall 2016, there were 2,231 late course registrations. This was less than half the amount of late registrations that occurred in Fall 2013 (6,037). The success rate among the 'Registered Late' group declined steadily from 75 percent in Fall 2013 to 70 percent in Fall 2015. In comparison, the success rate among the 'Registered On-Time' group varied inappreciably between 73 and 75 percent.

Table 2. Success in Credit Courses by Compliance with On-Time Registration Policy: Fall 2013 through Fall 2016

Course Outcome	Fall 2013 (Pre-Policy)				Fall 2014				Fall 2015				Fall 2016			
	Registered On-Time		Registered Late		Registered On-Time		Registered Late		Registered On-Time		Registered Late		Registered On-Time		Registered Late	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Success	80,700	73.1	4,546	75.3	77,233	74.5	951	72.5	85,923	74.4	1,374	73.1	82,365	75.0	1,551	69.5
Fail	29,749	26.9	1,491	24.7	26,455	25.5	360	27.5	29,519	25.6	505	26.9	27,468	25.0	680	30.5
Total	110,449	100.0	6,037	100.0	103,688	100.0	1,311	100.0	115,442	100.0	1,879	100.0	109,833	100.0	2,231	100.0

Note: Earning a grade of 'C' or higher is considered an indicator of success in credit courses. 'Fail' includes students who withdrew from the course and received a 'W.' Missing/audit grades not included. Headcount is duplicated.

V. Results Show There is Little Difference in Student Outcome.

A. Compliance is very high (example some data points). In order to make compliance easy for the students, 14-Week and 12-Weeks Sessions were offered for students who would have had issues completing their financial aid applications on time for the beginning of the session. This would have helped to increase compliance.

B. Outcome: There is not much difference between students who registered on time and students who registered late.

C. Courses for which students registered late were specifically analyzed. Even for the courses in which students registered late, the student outcome is not visibly different from those courses in which students registered on time.

VI. Why: Analysis

The outcome results of the on-time registration policy was puzzling. In further discussions and investigations, the following point was made: given the increased number of late registrations over a period of time, many faculty concluded that teaching subject matter in the first class may be futile since as many as 12-15 percent of students in the class do not come for the first class, and thus, the faculty need to repeat the material in the following class. This had become an academic practice in the last number of classes. This practice began a vicious circle as students apparently found the futility of attending the first class. Given this practice, even students missing the first class are not negatively impacted as far as student outcomes. However, faculty are spending time in explaining the syllabus, class policies, expectations for the course, and other critical topics is becoming critical in the community college classroom. This leads to the

question, what proportion of the first class needs to be spent on class orientation vs. content delivery.

A survey was conducted asking NOVA students to detail what was discussed in the first and second meetings of their classes in Fall 2016. When asked about the first class meeting, 85 percent of students stated that the time was spent reviewing the course syllabus. The survey results suggest that professors did not often begin lecturing on the subject material until the second class meeting.

Figure 3. Student Survey Results: Discussions in Early Class Meetings of Fall 2016
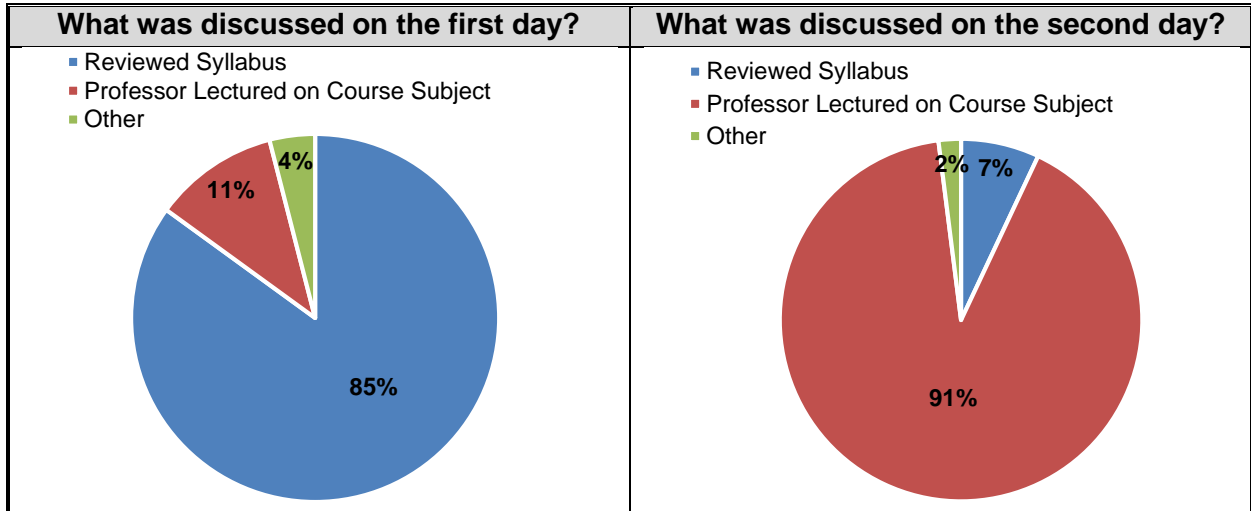
Note: Figures based on a survey of 391 students who enrolled on time for one or more of their classes during the Fall 2016 semester.

VII. Conclusion

Nearly all students, 96 to 98 percent, have complied with the on-time registration policy since its implementation in Fall 2014. Although this policy was not intended to improve the outcomes of students who already registered on time for their courses, it could reasonably be expected to reinforce habits that improve student success. Following the implementation of the on-time registration policy, the overall success rate in credit courses at NOVA increased marginally, from 73 percent in Fall 2013 to 75 percent in Fall 2016. The course success rate of students who registered late decreased by 5 percentage points over the same time period. To better understand these changes, future studies should more closely examine the characteristics of students who register late, as well as their outcomes on metrics other than course success. In addition, survey information from these students could be used to identify factors outside of on-time registration that may have affected their outcomes.