Student Development (SDV) courses help provide a successful transition to college for first-time students by strengthening their academic skills and helping them develop their college and career plans. This Research Brief compares the performance of first-time students based on their enrollment in SDV courses in order to explore the impact of taking these courses during the first year of college. Three cohorts are reviewed: Fall 2004, Fall 2005, and Fall 2006.

Performance by Cohort

Figure 1 presents the average end-of-year grade point average (GPA) for students in three cohorts: Fall 2004, Fall 2005, and Fall 2006. For each cohort, students who enrolled in SDV courses in their first or second semester performed at the same level or better than students who did not enroll in an SDV course during the first year. Of the students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first two semesters, the average GPA was slightly higher when their first SDV course was taken in their second semester.

1 SDV courses include SDV 100-College Success Skills, SDV 101-Orientation to: (a specific discipline), SDV 106-Preparation for Employment, SDV 107-Career Education, SDV 109-Student Leadership Development, SDV 195/295-Topics in: (topics vary by academic year).
2 First-time students are those who are attending any post-secondary educational institution for the first time.
3 Performance is measured in terms of the average cumulative grade point average (GPA) of students who enrolled in their first SDV course in their first or second semester and for those who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year.
4 Statistical tests were performed to determine if differences in the average GPA between groups were significant. All statistically significant differences are noted within the text as applicable and in the last section of this document.
Performance by Age Group

Figure 2 displays the average cumulative GPA\(^5\) for students by age group. In general, the average cumulative GPA for students of all age groups who enrolled in an SDV course within their first two semesters was higher compared to students who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year (with the exception of first-semester performance of students aged 21 and younger). Of the students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first two terms, the performance of students aged 22 to 29 and those 45 and older was better when their first SDV course was taken in their first semester. In contrast, students aged 21 and younger performed slightly better when their first SDV course was taken in their second semester. The performance of students aged 30 to 44 was the same whether their first SDV course was taken in their first or second semester.

![Figure 2. Average Cumulative GPA by Age Group](image_url)

Performance by Campus

Figure 3 displays the average cumulative GPA\(^6\) for students by campus. Of the students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first two terms, Manassas campus students had a higher average GPA when their first SDV course was taken in their first semester. In contrast, students at the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Medical Education (MEC) campuses showed stronger performance when their first SDV course was taken in their second semester. There were no differences in performance for students at the Annandale and Woodbridge campuses related to SDV course enrollment in their first year. The difference between the average GPA of first- and second-semester enrollment at the Alexandria campus was statistically significant.

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\(^5\) The cumulative grade point averages presented in Figure 2 are calculated by taking an average of the combined GPA of first-time students in the Fall 2004, Fall 2005, and Fall 2006 cohorts at the end of their second Fall semester.

\(^6\) The cumulative grade point averages presented in Figures 3 through 8 are calculated by taking an average of the combined GPA of first-time students in the Fall 2004, Fall 2005, and Fall 2006 cohorts at the end of their first year (Spring semester).
Performance by Gender

Figure 4 presents the average cumulative GPA for male and female students. Performance was slightly better for both male and female students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first two semesters compared to those who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year. Of the students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first year, female students performed slightly better when their first SDV course was taken in their second semester, while the performance of male students was the same whether their first SDV course was taken in their first or second semester.
Performance by Race/Ethnicity

Figure 5 presents student performance by race/ethnicity. With the exception of White students, the average cumulative GPA for all students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first year was higher than the GPA of students who did not enroll in an SDV course in their initial two semesters. Native American students who took an SDV course in their first year performed better when they enrolled in their first SDV course in their first semester. White, Black, and Asian students performed better when their first SDV course was taken in their second semester. The performance of Hispanic students was the same whether their first SDV course was taken in their first or second semester. The difference between the average GPA of White students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first semester and White students who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year was statistically significant.

Performance by Enrollment Status (Full-Time/Part-Time)

The average cumulative GPA for full-time and part-time students is shown in Figure 6. Of the full-time students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first year, the average GPA was slightly higher for those who enrolled in their first SDV course in their second semester compared to those who enrolled in an SDV course in their first semester; this difference was statistically significant. There was no difference in performance related to SDV course enrollment for part-time students.
Performance by Program

Figure 7 displays student performance by program of study. In general, the average cumulative GPA for program-placed students who enrolled in an SDV course within their first two semesters was higher compared to program-placed students who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year (with the exception of second-semester performance of students receiving a certificate). Students in certificate programs who enrolled in an SDV course in their first two terms had a higher average GPA when their first SDV course was taken in their first semester. Students in Associate of Arts (AA)/Associate of Science (AS) and Associate of Applied Arts (AAA)/Associate of Applied Science (AAS) programs who took an SDV course in their first year performed better when they enrolled in their first SDV course in their second semester. Students who were not placed and did not take an SDV course in their first two semesters performed better than those who enrolled in an SDV course in their first year; this difference was statistically significant.

Figure 7. Average Cumulative GPA by Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>First Semester</th>
<th>Second Semester</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA/AS</td>
<td>2.466</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AAA/AAS</td>
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<td>491</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,466</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>2,719</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Performance by Number of Credits

Figure 8 shows the average cumulative GPA for students based on the number of credit hours for which they were enrolled during their first semester. For students who took fewer than 12 credits, there was no difference in GPA related to SDV course enrollment. There was only a slight difference in the average GPA of students with 18 or more credits who enrolled in an SDV course in their first year compared to those who did not enroll during that time. Students who took 12 to 17 credits and enrolled in an SDV course during their first two terms had a higher average GPA than students with the same number of credit hours who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year; the SDV-enrolled students had a slightly higher average GPA when their first SDV course was taken in their second semester. The difference between the average GPA for first- and second-semester SDV course enrollment for students with 12-17 credits was statistically significant.
Performance was compared for first-time students who enrolled in Student Development (SDV) courses during their first or second semester and for those who did not enroll in SDV courses in their first year. Performance, measured as the cumulative average GPA, was analyzed by cohort, age group, campus, gender, race/ethnicity, enrollment status, program placement, and credit load. In most comparisons, students who enrolled in SDV courses in either of their first two semesters had a higher average GPA than students who did not enroll in an SDV course in their first year. Of those students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first or second semester, most groups of students who took an SDV course in their second semester had a slightly higher GPA at the end of their first year than those who took an SDV course in their first semester. A higher GPA in the second semester could be attributable to students’ increasing confidence levels and college skills as they proceed through their college career.

**Statistically Significant Differences in Performance**

As noted in the text, the following differences in performance were statistically significant⁷:

**Alexandria Campus** – A higher GPA for students who enrolled in their first SDV course in their second semester compared to students who enrolled in their first SDV course in their first semester.

**White Students** – A higher GPA for students who did not enroll in an SDV course during their first two terms compared to students who enrolled in their first SDV course during their first semester.

**Full-Time Students** – A higher GPA for students who had their first SDV course in their second semester compared to students who took their first SDV course during their first semester.

**Students Not Program-Placed** – A higher GPA for students who did not take an SDV course in their first two semesters compared to students who enrolled in an SDV course in their first semester.

**Students with 12-17 Credit Hours** – A higher GPA for students who took their first SDV course during their second semester compared to students who took their first SDV course during their first semester.

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⁷ Statistical significance was determined by Tukeys Multiple Comparison Tests.