RESEARCH BRIEF

Excess Credit Accumulation at Graduation by Degree and Major: 2018-19 NOVA Graduates

By the time community college students reach graduation, many will have earned significantly more credits than required for their degree or credential. This means that some courses in which students enroll will ultimately not count toward their intended academic goals. This phenomenon, referred to as excess credit accumulation, is a significant burden on students for many reasons. First, when students take excess credits, they spend more money than needed to complete their degree. Second, each additional excess course can prolong the time it takes before a student can transfer to a four-year institution or enter the workforce and start their career.

Students earn excess credits for a variety of reasons, such as changing programs or majors or insufficient academic planning. NOVA implemented guided pathways in Fall 2018 to help students stay on the path to degree completion, but a better understanding of which graduates are leaving NOVA with the most excess credits can help the College deliver targeted interventions and improved academic planning to help all students succeed in a timely manner.

In This Brief

This Research Brief presents data regarding the average number of excess credits NOVA graduates earned at graduation by degree and major. Excess credits are presented in relation to each program's credit requirements for graduation.

Key Findings: All Programs

- Among all programs in 2018-19, Occupational Therapy Assistant (A.A.S.), Engineering Technology (A.A.S.), and Nursing (A.A.S.) graduates earned the most excess credits. Graduates of these programs earned an average of 33 to 34 credits above their program's credit requirement for graduation.

Key Findings: Most Popular Programs

- Among programs with 100 or more graduates in 2018-19, Nursing (A.A.S.) and Engineering (A.S.) graduates earned the most excess credits at graduation. Nursing graduates earned an average of 33 excess credits, and Engineering graduates earned an average of 20 excess credits.

- Among programs with 100 or more graduates in 2018-19, Business Administration (A.S.) and General Studies (A.S.) graduates earned the fewest excess credits at graduation, with graduates of both programs averaging eight excess credits.

Excess Credit Accumulation: A.A. and A.S. Degree Graduates

Among graduates of A.A. and A.S. degree programs at NOVA, Engineering (A.S.) graduates earned the most excess credits. On average, Engineering graduates earned 84 credits, which is 20 credits more than the 64 credits required to graduate from the program. Conversely, General Studies (A.S.) degree graduates earned the fewest excess credits on average.

Figure 1. Excess Credit Accumulation Among A.A. and A.S. Degree Graduates by Major: 2018-19 NOVA Graduates
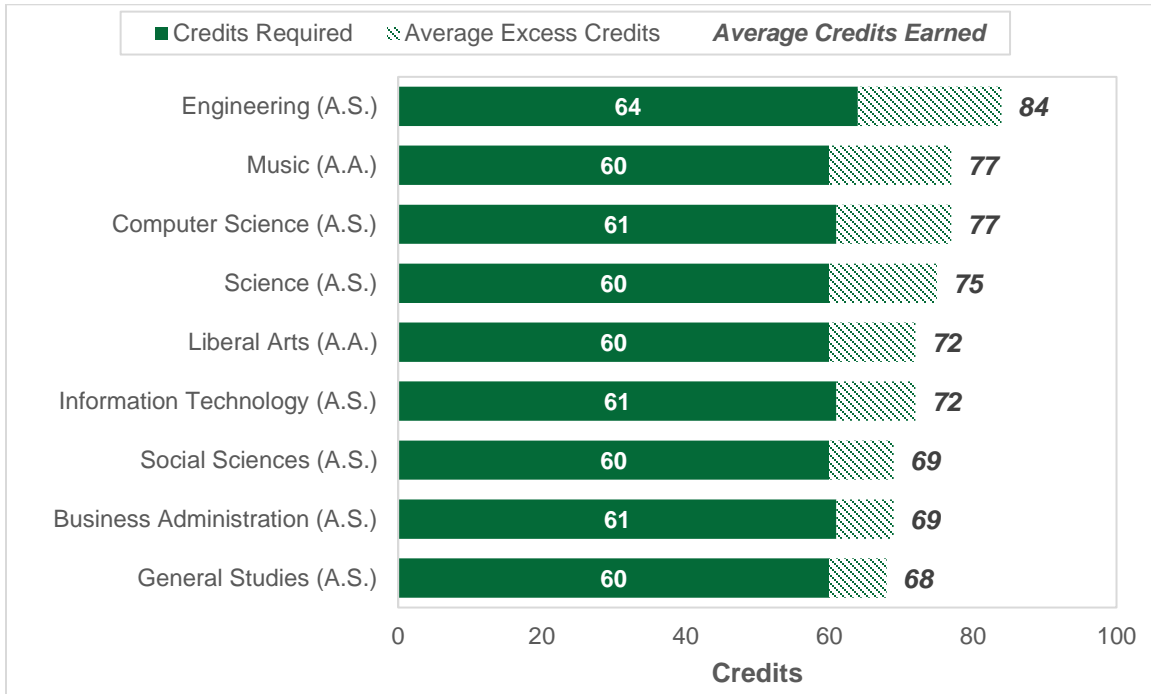

Table 1. Excess Credit Accumulation Among A.A. and A.S. Degree Graduates by Major: 2018-19 NOVA Graduates

Major	2018-19 Graduates	Average Credits Earned*	Total Credits Required**	Ratio of Credits Earned to Credits Req.	Average Excess Credits
Engineering (A.S.)	188	84	64	1.31	20
Music (A.A.)	6	77	60	1.28	17
Computer Science (A.S.)	257	77	61	1.26	16
Science (A.S.)	343	75	60	1.26	15
Liberal Arts (A.A.)	255	72	60	1.20	12
Information Technology (A.S.)	348	72	61	1.18	11
Social Sciences (A.S.)	514	69	60	1.16	9
Business Administration (A.S.)	770	69	61	1.14	8
General Studies (A.S.)	1,415	68	60	1.13	8

*Credits that do not count towards graduation (e.g. credits earned in developmental or ESL courses) are not included in average Credits Earned. Average Credits Earned include credits taken outside of the student's major field of study.
**Total Credits Required is based on the number of credits required for graduation as specified in the 2018-19 Catalog. However, students are held to the requirements of the Catalog that was in effect at the time of their admission to the degree program.
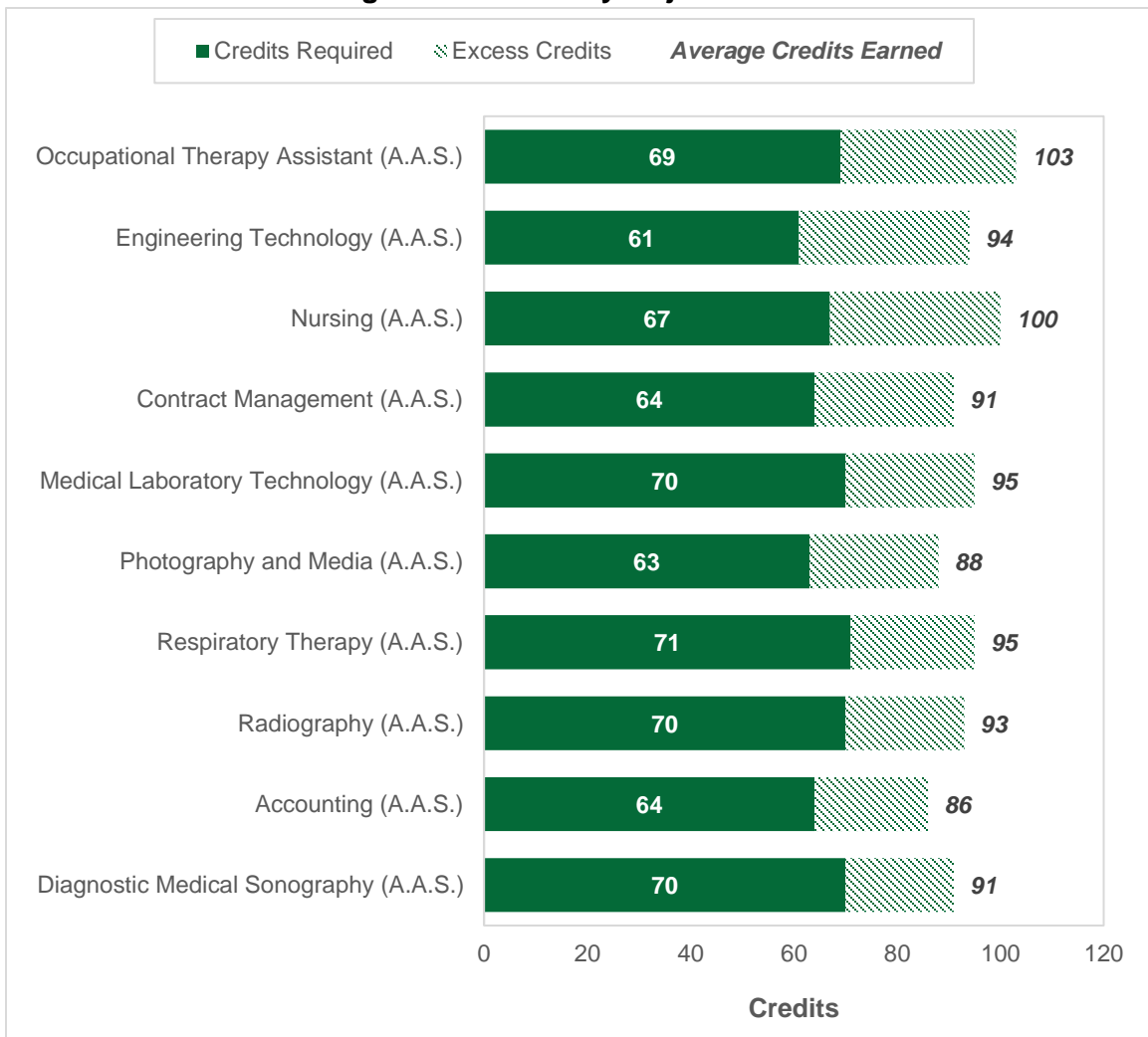Notes: Data account for students' first and second majors at graduation. All graduates in degree specializations are included under the parent degree program, and total credits required for graduation are for the parent program. Some specializations may have slightly different credit requirements.

Excess Credit Accumulation: A.A.A., A.A.S., and A.F.A. Degree Graduates

Figure 2, below, shows the top 10 programs with excess credit accumulation among graduates of A.A.A., A.A.S., and A.F.A. degree programs at NOVA. Table 2, on the following page, shows all A.A.A., A.A.S., and A.F.A. degree programs. Programs are sorted in descending order of the average number of excess credits upon graduation.

Among graduates of these degree programs, Occupational Therapy Assistant (A.A.S.) graduates earned the most excess credits. On average, Occupational Therapy Assistant graduates earned 103 credits, which is 34 credits more than the 69 credits required to graduate from the program. Additionally, Engineering Technology (A.A.S.) and Nursing (A.A.S.) graduates earned an average of 33 excess credits at the time of graduation from NOVA.

Figure 2. Top 10 Programs with Excess Credit Accumulation Among A.A.A., A.A.S. and A.F.A Degree Graduates by Major: 2018-19 NOVA Graduates

Table 2. Excess Credit Accumulation Among A.A.A., A.A.S., and A.F.A. Degree Graduates by Major: 2018-19 NOVA Graduates

Major	2018-19 Graduates	Average Credits Earned*	Total Credits Required**	Ratio of Credits Earned to Credits Required	Average Excess Credits
Occupational Therapy Assist. (A.A.S.)	16	103	69	1.50	34
Engineering Technology (A.A.S.)	11	94	61	1.54	33
Nursing (A.A.S.)	139	100	67	1.49	33
Contract Management (A.A.S.)	7	91	64	1.42	27
Medical Laboratory Tech. (A.A.S.)	13	95	70	1.35	25
Photography and Media (A.A.S.)	14	88	63	1.39	25
Respiratory Therapy (A.A.S.)	13	95	71	1.34	24
Radiography (A.A.S.)	33	93	70	1.32	23
Accounting (A.A.S.)	24	86	64	1.35	22
Diagnostic Medical Sonography (A.A.S.)	18	91	70	1.31	21
ASL to English Interpretation (A.A.S.)	7	85	65	1.30	20
Architecture Technology (A.A.S.)	10	87	67	1.29	20
Business Management (A.A.S.)	50	86	66	1.30	20
Dental Hygiene (A.A.S.)	39	92	72	1.27	20
Early Childhood Development (A.A.S.)	72	81	62	1.30	19
Cybersecurity (A.A.S.)	198	82	65	1.26	17
Graphic Design (A.A.S.)	29	81	64	1.27	17
Visual Arts (A.F.A.)	10	79	62	1.27	17
Construction Management Tech. (A.A.S.)	20	84	68	1.23	16
Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (A.A.S.)	34	82	67	1.22	15
Emergency Medical Services (A.A.S.)	20	82	67	1.23	15
Administration of Justice (A.A.S.)	54	78	66	1.18	12
Automotive Technology (A.A.S.)	49	78	66	1.19	12
Information Systems Technology (A.A.S.)	57	77	65	1.19	12
Marketing (A.A.S.)	6	73	61	1.20	12
Music (A.A.A.)	2	77	65	1.18	12
Physical Therapist Assistant (A.A.S.)	28	81	69	1.17	12
Hospitality Management (A.A.S.)	20	73	62	1.17	11
Biotechnology (A.A.S.)	7	74	64	1.15	10
Health Information Management (A.A.S.)	7	82	72	1.14	10
Interior Design (A.A.S.)	17	74	64	1.15	10
Paralegal Studies (A.A.S.)	31	72	63	1.14	9
Horticulture Technology (A.A.S.)	5	71	63	1.12	8
Veterinary Technology (A.A.S.)	41	75	68	1.10	7
Fire Science Technology (A.A.S.)	1	70	67	1.04	3

*Credits that do not count towards graduation (e.g. credits earned in developmental or ESL courses) are not included in Average Credits Earned. Average Credits Earned include credits taken outside of the student's major field of study.

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Notes: Data account for students' first and second majors at graduation. All graduates in degree specializations are included under the parent degree program, and total credits required for graduation are for the parent program. Some specializations may have slightly different credit requirements.

Excess Credit Accumulation Among Programs with the Most NOVA Graduates

In 2018-19, ten NOVA programs had 100 or more graduates. Of these ten programs, Nursing (A.A.S.) graduates earned substantially more excess credits on average than other large programs. On average, Nursing students earned 33 excess credits when they graduated from NOVA.

Figure 3. Top 5 Excess Credit Accumulation Among Programs with the Most NOVA Graduates: 2018-19 NOVA Graduates
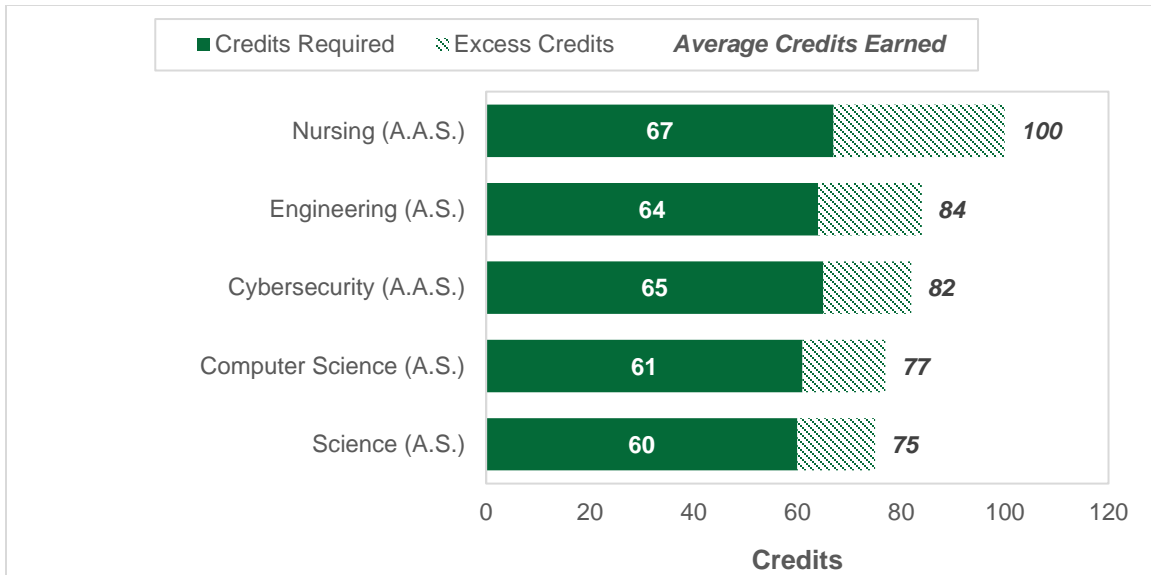

Table 3. Excess Credit Accumulation Among Top 10 Programs with the Most NOVA Graduates in 2018-19

Major	2018-19 Graduates	Average Credits Earned*	Total Credits Required**	Ratio of Credits Earned to Credits Required	Average Excess Credits
Nursing (A.A.S.)	139	100	67	1.49	33
Engineering (A.S.)	188	84	64	1.31	20
Cybersecurity (A.A.S.)	198	82	65	1.26	17
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