

RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 09-17

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Achievement Gap Analysis Series – Fall-to-Spring Retention: Fall 2011 through Fall 2013

NOVA’s commitment to student success is demonstrated by the College’s participation in the Achieving the Dream (ATD) National Reform Network. ATD is a comprehensive nationwide reform movement for student success in which NOVA has been a member since 2007 and a Leader College since 2010. NOVA’s participation in ATD encourages continuous monitoring of student outcomes in order to identify areas for improvement. Such attempts are based on research that leads to student success and closing the achievement gaps.

This Research Brief is part of a series examining recent trends in achievement gaps among first-time in college (FTIC) students in the following indicators of student success: course completion, retention, graduation rates, success in gatekeeper courses, success in developmental courses, and developmental student success in college-level courses.

This Research Brief examines achievement gaps in the Fall-to-Spring retention rates among three cohorts of FTIC students (Fall 2011 through Fall 2013).¹ Fall-to-Spring retention measures the percentage of the fall cohort of FTIC students who enrolled in the Spring semester of the same academic year. Data is disaggregated and analyzed by student demographics: enrollment status (full-time or part-time), gender, age, race/ethnicity, and program placement.²

Key Findings

- Overall, achievement gaps in Fall-to-Spring retention rates were found when data was disaggregated by student **enrollment status, age, race/ethnicity, and program placement**.
- Students ages 21 and under, Asian students, and students enrolled in A.A. or A.S. programs had better Fall-to-Spring retention rates than their counterparts.
- Although there was a small achievement gap along gender lines, the difference was less than 1 percentage point.

Section 1. Achievement Gaps in Fall-to-Spring Retention

Table 1 shows the overall fall-to-spring retention rates of FTIC students from Fall 2011 through Fall 2013. In each cohort, between 72 and 74 percent of FTIC students returned to NOVA in the Spring semester.

Table 1. Fall-to-Spring Retention of FTIC Students: Fall 2011 through Fall 2013 Cohorts

Fall 2011 Cohort			Fall 2012 Cohort			Fall 2013 Cohort		
Total Enrolled	Returned in Spring		Total Enrolled	Returned in Spring		Total Enrolled	Returned in Spring	
	#	%		#	%		#	%
12,758	9,287	72.8%	13,436	9,651	71.8%	13,644	10,089	73.9%

¹ OIR originally published the details of this study in “Achievement Gap Analysis Report 2 – Fall-to-Spring Retention by Enrollment Status,” available at: <http://www.nvcc.edu/oir/files/FalltoSpringRetentionReportDraft31416.pdf>.

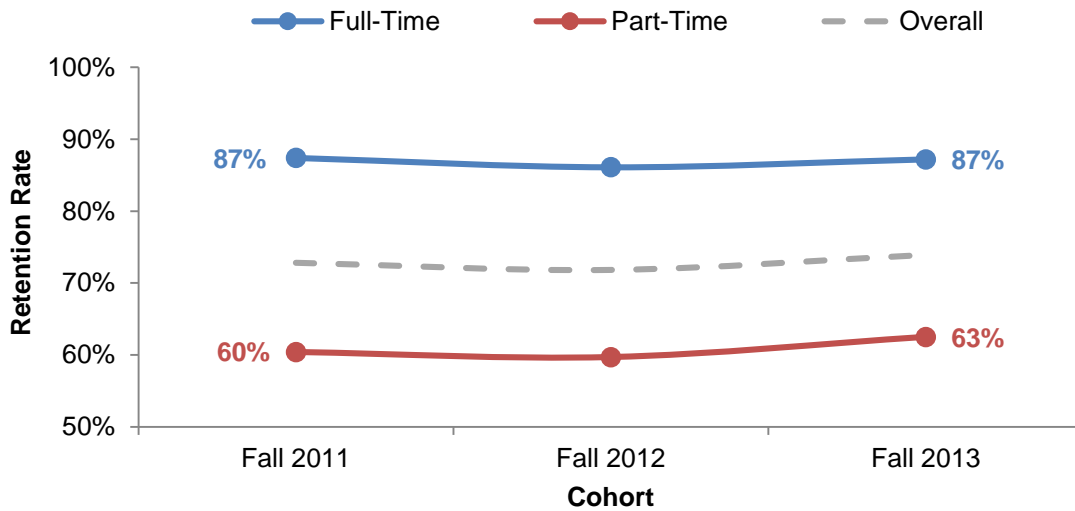
² All demographics are as of the student’s first term.

Enrollment Status

Fall-to-Spring retention was consistently higher (up to 27 percentage points) for full-time students than part-time students.

- Full-time students' retention rates remained around 87 percent across cohorts, while part-time students' Fall-to-Spring retention rates increased from 60 to 63 percent from the Fall 2011 cohort to the Fall 2013 cohort.
- Full-time students comprised 46 percent in each cohort.

Figure 1. Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Enrollment Status: Fall 2011 through Fall 2013 Cohorts

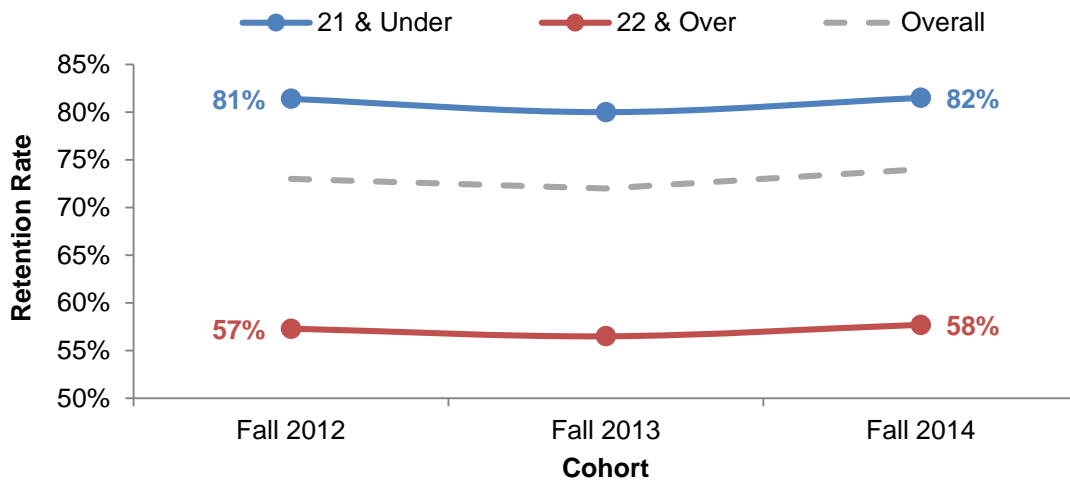


Age

Fall-to-Spring retention rates show an achievement gap by age. Younger students (ages 21 and under) had better Fall-to-Spring retention rates than older students. On average, over 60 percent of students in each cohort were ages 21 and under.

- While around 81 percent of students ages 21 and under returned to NOVA in the spring, only about 57 percent of older students did so.

Figure 2. Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Age: Fall 2011 through Fall 2013 Cohorts

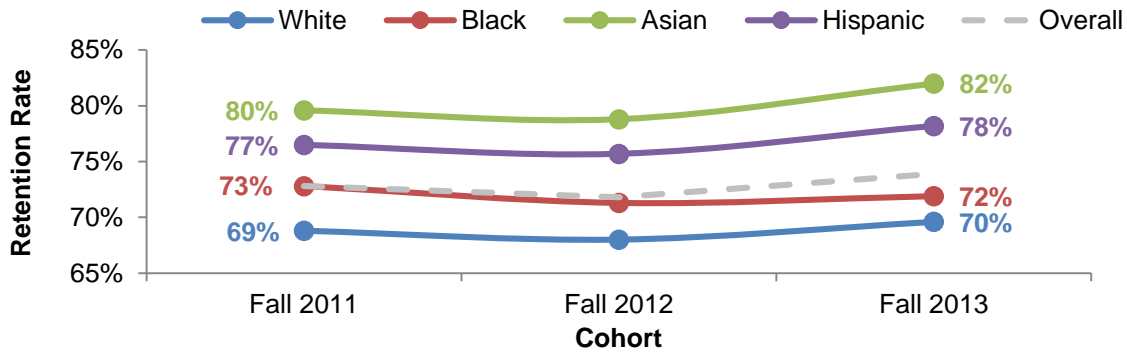


Race/Ethnicity

The data shows an achievement gap in the Fall-to-Spring retention rates of FTIC students by race/ethnicity.

- Asian students had the highest retention rates (around 80 percent), followed by Hispanic students (about 77 percent).
- Black students' Fall-to-Spring retention rates were similar to the overall rate, about 72 percent.
- White students consistently had the lowest retention rates (about 69 percent).
- These gaps appear correlated to the enrollment status of each racial/ethnic group. For example, 57 percent of Asian students – the group with the highest retention rates – attended NOVA full-time. In contrast, only 40 percent of White students – who had the lowest retention rate – attended full-time.³

Figure 3. Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Race/Ethnicity: Fall 2011 through Fall 2013 Cohorts

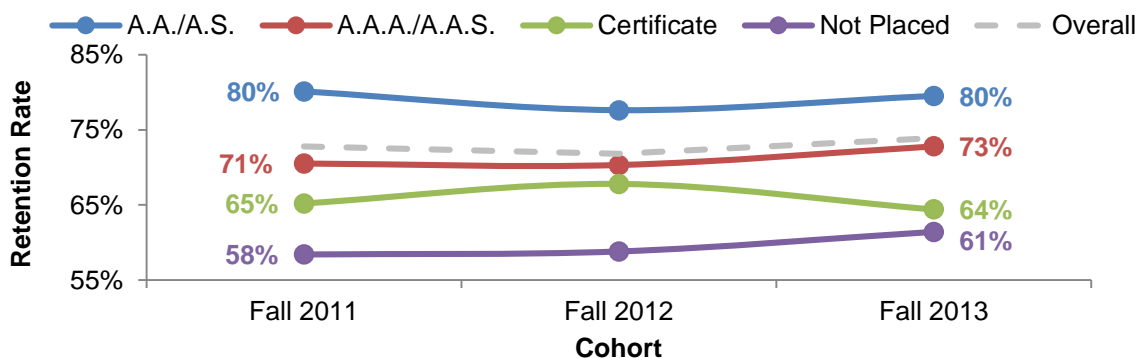


Program Placement

The data shows an achievement gap in Fall-to-Spring retention based on students' choice of degree or certificate program.

- Over half of FTIC students were enrolled in either an A.A. or A.S. degree program. Of these students, about 79 percent returned to NOVA in the spring.
- The Fall-to-Spring retention rate of students in A.A.A. or A.A.S. degree programs averaged about 71 percent, compared to an average rate of about 66 percent for students in Certificate programs.
- Students who were not enrolled in a degree or certificate program (Not Placed) had the lowest Fall-to-Spring retention rates, about 60 percent. In each cohort, a little less than one-quarter of students were Not Placed.
- Students in A.A. and A.S. degree programs were more likely to attend NOVA full-time, while students who were Not Placed or enrolled in A.A.A., A.A.S., or Certificate programs were more likely to attend part-time.³

Figure 4. Fall-to-Spring Retention Rates by Program Placement: Fall 2011 through Fall 2013 Cohorts



³ For a breakdown of demographics by enrollment status, see report: "Achievement Gap Analysis Report 2 – Fall-to-Spring Retention by Enrollment Status," available at: <http://www.nvcc.edu/oir/files/FalltoSpringRetentionReportDraft31416.pdf>.

Section 2. Other Findings

Gender

There was a small achievement gap in Fall-to-Spring retention by gender. Although female students' Fall-to-Spring retention rate was consistently higher than that of male students, the difference was less than 1 percentage point in each cohort. Male students were slightly more likely to attend full-time than female students (49 percent versus 43 percent) in the Fall 2011 cohort.

Section 3. Discussion of Findings

Overall, the data in this Research Brief reveals a number of achievement gaps among FTIC students in terms of Fall-to-Spring retention. Students who were part-time, male, ages 22 and older, Black, Hispanic, enrolled in certificate programs, or not program placed were less likely than other students to be retained from Fall to Spring.

These findings mirror national trends. Current research consistently shows that male persistence and achievement lag behind that of female students.⁴ The gender gap is most pervasive among Black students, with Black female students earning 68 percent of all associate degrees awarded to Black students.⁵ In addition, national data shows that Black and Hispanic students trail Asian and White students on a number of student success metrics. As of 2008, only 30 percent of African Americans and 20 percent of Latinos between the ages of 25 and 34 had attained an associate degree or higher compared to 49 percent of White students and 71 percent of Asian students.⁶

Closing Achievement Gaps at NOVA

NOVA's Start Strong policy changes, launched in Fall 2014, were based on recommendations from the ATD Core Team. Such policy changes are expected to help in closing achievement gaps. For example, NOVA's orientation, advising, and Student Development course policies provide targeted interventions for FTIC students ages 17 to 24 through the GPS for Success program. The goal of GPS for Success is to help students succeed in college by fostering connections with professional advisors and faculty who help students plan for and attain their academic goals.

One of ATD's six capacity areas for student success is Equity. This capacity area is used as a framework for a faculty-led pilot on teaching and learning that promotes equitable outcomes for all students.

The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) provides additional insight into how NOVA might approach closing achievement gaps. SENSE provides benchmark data in several areas that can help NOVA understand students' critical early experiences and improve policies and practices that affect student success in the first year. Results of the 2015 SENSE indicated that, relative to other community colleges nationwide, NOVA is underperforming in the "High Expectations and Aspirations," "Engaged Learning," and "Academic and Social Support Network" benchmarks. NOVA must continue to explore the implications of these benchmark scores and identify intervention strategies to help boost student success.

In addition, NOVA faculty on ATD teams are currently examining strategies to improve equity in the classroom through teaching and learning. Future research on achievement gaps at NOVA should take a comprehensive approach to data analysis by triangulating NOVA student data along with surveys, focus groups, and outside research on community college best practices for FTIC students.

⁴ Lee, J. M., & Ransom, T. (2011). The educational experience of young men of color: A review of research, pathways, and progress. Retrieved from College Board website: <http://youngmenofcolor.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/downloads/EEYMCResearchReport.pdf>.

⁵ Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2014). Comprehensive Fact Sheet: Men of Color in Higher Education. Retrieved from: http://www.ccsse.org/docs/MoC_Long_Fact_Sheet.pdf?ts=20170113182911.

⁶ Lee & Ransom 2011.