

**Transfer Students at NVU:
An Analysis of Enrollments, Persistence, Credit Atrication, and
Website Materials**

Initiated & Conducted via NVU's Title III Grant

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Spring 2022

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Introduction

The Chronicle of Higher Education, EAB, and the John Gardner Institute are among the organizations that have recently underlined the importance of transfer students to, and expressed concern over their equitable treatment in, U.S. higher education. Meanwhile, in 2021 Gardner and his colleagues published *The Transfer Experience: A Handbook for Creating a More Equitable and Successful Postsecondary System*. Indeed, nationally more than half of all U.S. undergraduates bring credits from more than one institution, which defines transfer status. There is, by now, a National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students (NISTS) to monitor the more than 60% of American college students who change higher education institutions at least once. And that doesn't even count those who bring credits from dual enrollment while in high school.

Although the percentage of NVU students who are transfers is lower than the national average, it is still significant: generally, between a quarter to more-than-a-third of all students, depending upon whether NVU-Online (EDP) students are included in the count. Since the institution's original proposal to the U.S. Department of Education, NVU's current Title III project has recognized the importance of transfer students. Their inclusion from the outset, as among the student groupings meriting attention, was noteworthy, as transfers—who are not part of the more scrutinized Federal Cohort—are too often left out of conventional analyses and action plans.

As John Gardner and others have made clear, in many colleges and universities across the country, transfers often find that credits earned elsewhere are not accepted by the receiving institution. Worse, in a form of bait and switch, many of the credits accepted end up satisfying no requirements at all, neither for general education nor the major. This means that transfers often end up graduating with—and paying for—far more than the minimum number of required credits.

We had a hunch that this regrettable situation is emphatically not the case at NVU, and that NVU's is a happier story to tell when it comes to transfers. But we wanted to be able to tell the story of transfers to NVU with data behind it. This report represents our initial attempt to analyze the situation of transfer students from the time of their acceptance to their graduation from NVU (or, perhaps, another institution). **As suspected, the trends are generally positive and encouraging, showing transfer students to be a bright spot at NVU.**

First we present a series of slides describing transfer student trends between 2015 and 2021, followed by some high-level takeaways from the data. Then we offer, briefly, the results of a qualitative scan of NVU's public-facing website for its presentation of policies and procedures affecting transfers. Finally, we propose a short list of recommendations for NVU's administration and community to consider.

Note: This report does not contain all of the analyses that were conducted. For additional information or questions, please reach out to the TIII Research & Evaluation Specialist, Adam Johnson (amj06180@nvu.vsc.edu)

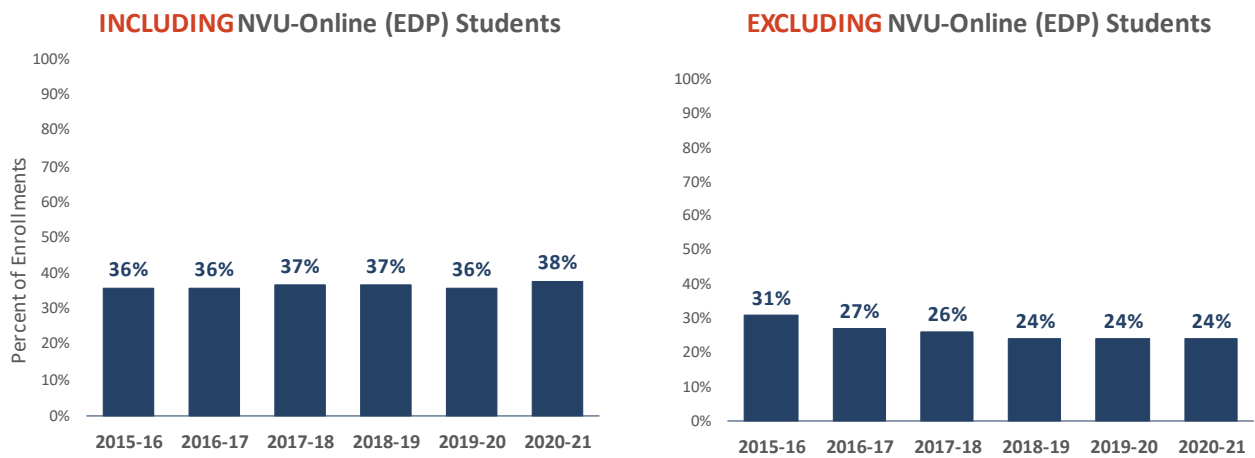
Summary of TIII Analysis & Key Findings

Transfer Student Trends, 2015-2021

1. Transfer students are a sizeable portion of the NVU student population and deserve continued, if not additional, attention.

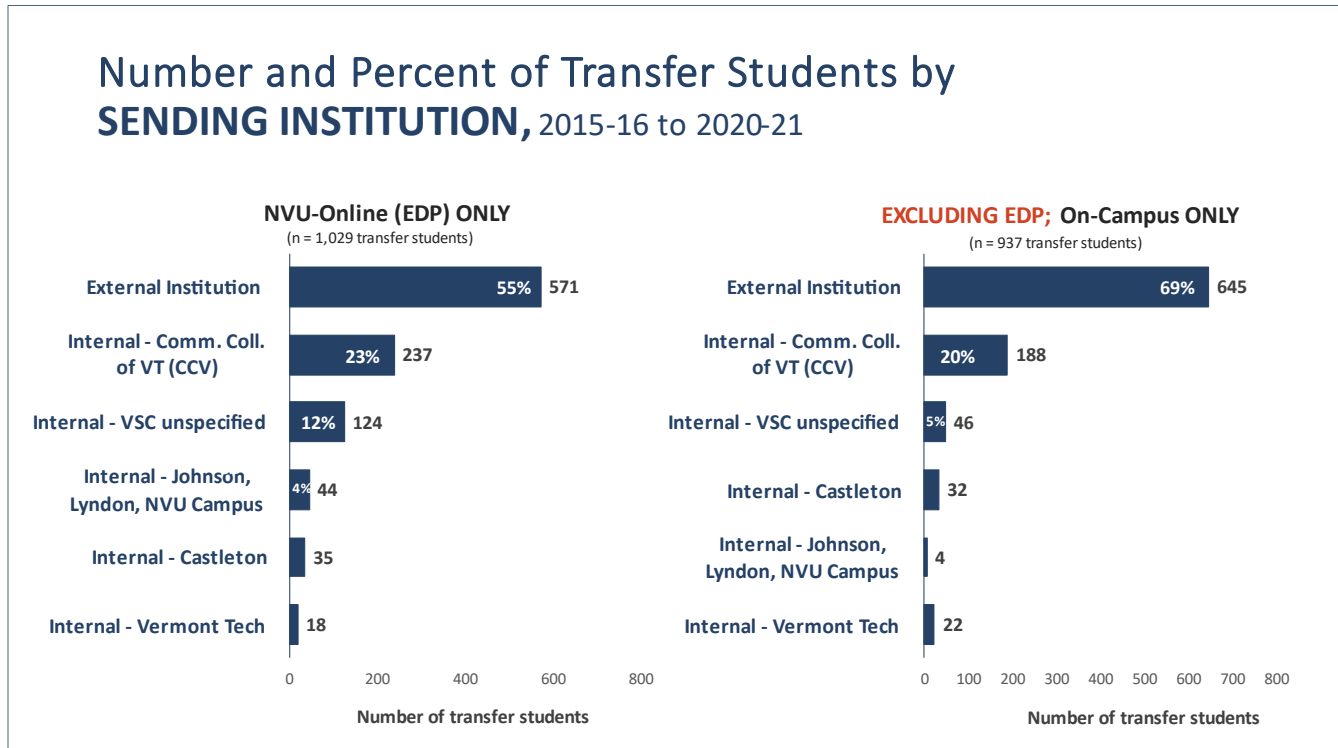
- Transfer students comprise roughly 25% of all campus-based, degree-seeking students.
- This number rises to 35% when including NVU-Online students.

Percent of All Annual Degree-Seeking Enrollments who are Transfer Student Enrollments, 2015-16 to 2020-21



2. Students primarily transfer in to NVU from outside the VSCS system.

- 69% of on-campus transfer students enter NVU from outside the VSCS.
- However, roughly 45% of NVU-Online transfers come from a VSCS institution.



3. The typical transfer student is NOT the prototypical 18-22 year old.

- The average on-campus transfer student is 24 years old, with second-semester Sophomore status by credits.
- The average NVU-Online transfer student is 34 years old, with first-semester Junior status by credits.

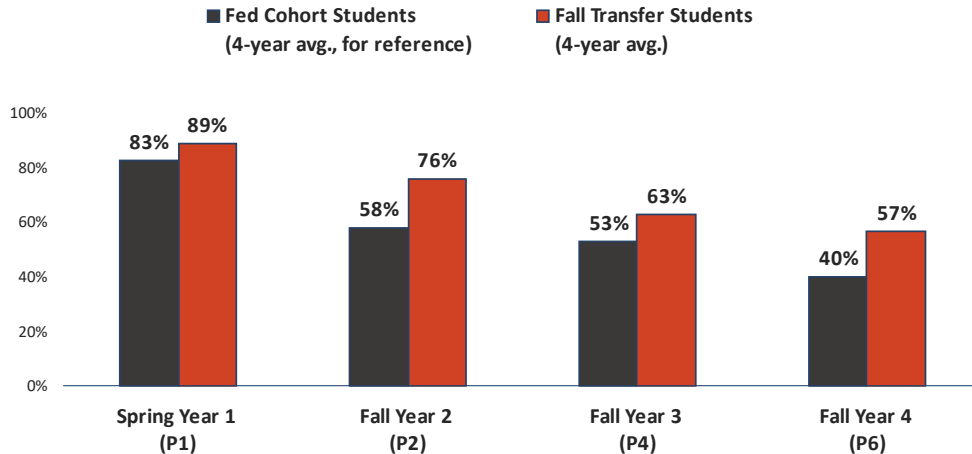
	NVU-Online (EDP) Transfers	NVU On-Campus Transfers
Average Age	33.7 years old	24.3 years old
Percent Female	77%	52%
Percent BIPOC	11%	16%
Percent First Gen	52%	48%
Percent In-State (VT)	78%	71%
Percent Pell Recipients	38%	41%

4. Transfer students retain at significantly higher rates compared to first-time students.

- Year-over-year retention rates are roughly 10% higher on average for transfers vs. first-time students

Retention Rates for Transfer Students (non EDP, oncampus only)

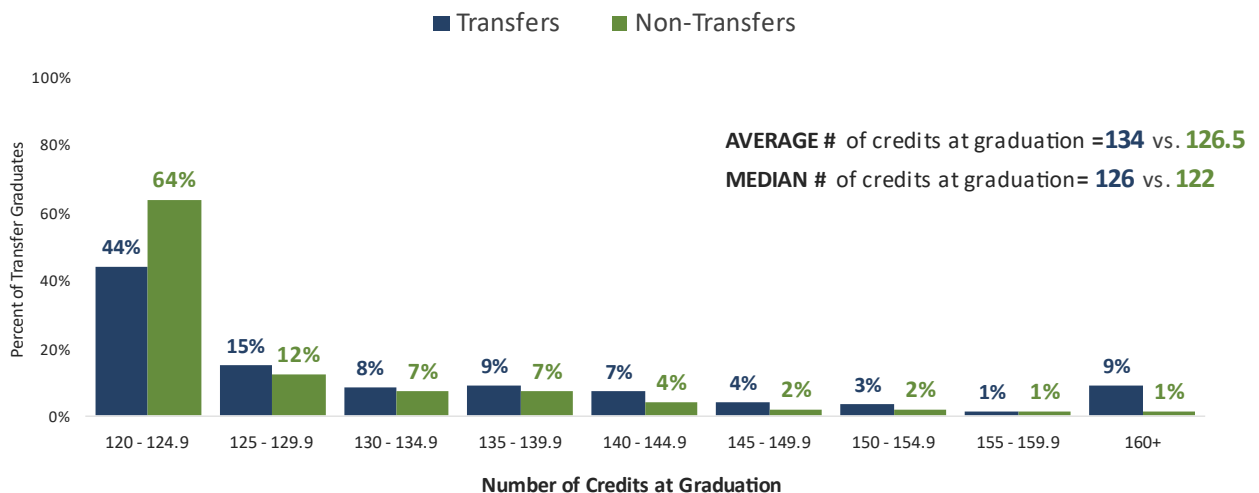
(4-year averages for fall start-term students, 17FA - 20FA)



5. Transfers who graduate from NVU do not typically have problematic levels of excess credits.

- For transfers, the median number of credits at graduation is 126 vs. 122 for first-time students
- Only one-third of transfers have more than one full semester's worth of excess credits at graduation (>135).

CREDITS AT GRADUATION: Transfers compared to Non-Transfers who Graduated with a Bachelors Degree



6. NVU's transfer-credit articulation practices are transfer-friendly.

- NVU accepts nearly 100% of transfer credits presented.
- Of those, nearly 60% count toward specific degree requirements for an NVU degree.
- This info is based on a transcript analysis of Fall 2018 – Fall 2020 transfers (n = 397).

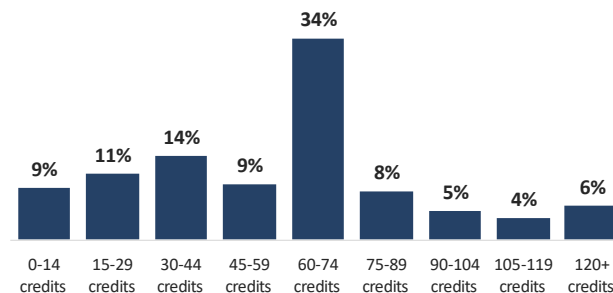
Number of Credits Transferred into NVU

Fall 2018 - 2020 Transfers

Fall 2018 – 2020 transfers brought in an average of **59 credits**.

NVU accepted nearly **100%** of credits presented for transfer.

Distribution of Credits Transferred In



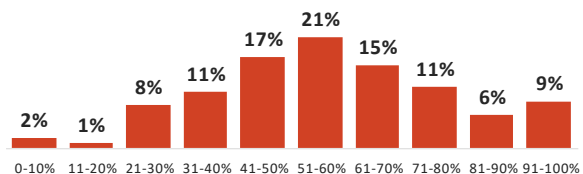
Number of credits transferred in

Percent of Transfer Credits that Satisfy an NVU Requirement

Fall 2019 & Fall 2020 Transfers

On average, **58% of transfer credits count** toward an NVU curricular requirement or graduation requirement (i.e., gen ed, major requirements). Remaining credits count toward the 120-credit degree requirement.

Distribution of the Percentage of Transfer Credits that Fulfill a Requirement



Percent of credits transferred in

Qualitative Review of Website Materials

As noted previously, we also scanned the website for insights it might yield on transfers at NVU.

Overall we found a transfer-friendly presentation.

Although it's true that Northern Vermont University's foundational statements, including its core mission, vision and statement of community values, contain no explicit mention of transfer students—or, for that matter, any other particular student grouping—the emphasis on «diversity» and «inclusion» does leave room for them. More importantly perhaps, the landing page includes an «admissions and aid» button that provides a clear link to «transfer students» in general as well as one for those coming from CCV and other, selected institutions. A search on the public-facing website for «transfer» yields a set of pages that, taken together, emphasize flexible pathways and a clear, straightforward transfer process.

There is information on transfer admissions policy; transfer admissions day; transfer family/sibling discounts; transfer scholarships; and a link to a «welcome, transfer students!» page. Most compelling of all are the search links to profiles of several current and recent transfer students. The search for «transfer» also features a photograph and capsule description of the admissions staff member, an associate director, with responsibility for campus transfers. We could not find any housing or registration information that was specific to transfer students, which might make it difficult for prospective transfers to glean their place in the queues for course or possible room selection. And finally, the registrar's link contains a full listing of staff members, including the person who serves as transfer credit coordinator and online advisor.

We think that all this, taken together, amounts to an overall transfer-friendly presentation.

III Recommendations

1. NVU should make more visible and explicit the portion of the institution's success story that has to do with transfers, especially as conveyed in key documents and on the public web site.
2. NVU should continue to gather systematic data on transfer students, as they are too often ignored in routine data-gathering and analysis, which tend to focus on the Federal Cohort.
3. There is much we don't know about transfers to NVU: for instance, even the extent to which they wish to be regarded and served as transfers, as opposed to merely integrated into their respective NVU graduation classes. Personnel should be deployed (or added) as necessary to engage in these conversations, if they prove difficult to accomplish in time-sensitive admissions or advising meetings.
4. NVU should consider joining NISTS, the National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students.
5. Using the Clearinghouse, NVU should track students who ultimately depart for (and eventually graduate from) other institutions.
6. Finally, NVU should consider regarding such students as part of the institution's success story, instead of a series of marks against retention. From the perspective of student (rather than institutional) success, helping someone prepare for and negotiate a transfer, which leads to eventual graduation, could be part of the NVU story, instead of a footnote or addendum or, worse, an unmentionable. It could also be regarded on the plus side of the ledger for the sending university, instead of a failure.