

## CLEP® Serves the Diverse Needs of a Constantly Evolving Student Body

Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), located near Washington, D.C., serves a student population of more than 75,000 across six campuses and 400 off-campus sites, and these students come from more than 130 countries around the world. Part of the Virginia Community College System of 23 community colleges, NOVA is the largest educational institution in Virginia and the second-largest community college in the United States. For decades, credit for prior learning has been an important opportunity for NOVA students to accelerate their college plans. Students are typically awarded three to six credits for passing scores in general education CLEP® exams and up to 16 credits in specific CLEP subject exams, including French, German, and Spanish.

CLEP continues to be a foundational component of the college's credit for prior learning emphasis, and administrators have built their approach through the development of comprehensive informational resources for faculty and advising staff, the consistent outreach to faculty and students, and a flexible but well-defined policy for keeping their CLEP credit policies current and aligned to their course lineup and degree programs.

### A Manual Makes a Difference

Administrators at NOVA make it a policy to provide registrars, counselors, and faculty with comprehensive information about CLEP opportunities. Each year, the college develops new credit for prior learning opportunities and updates its *Credit for Prior Learning* manual. The manual, available in print and digital formats, details NOVA's credit acceptance policies, including minimum qualifying scores, required documentation, and courses aligned to CLEP examinations. In addition to providing essential information, Sharon Robertson notes that the manual draws attention to the "big picture" of credit for prior learning at NOVA.

“Our committee that determines policies for granting CLEP credits meets regularly to review alignments between the current portfolio of CLEP exams and our course equivalents. Policy review and development is our primary focus; however, we also find that this committee is critical to institution-wide communication about CLEP opportunities for students. Faculty, counselors, registrars, and other administrators receive timely current information about CLEP and credit for prior learning and its benefits; they share this information with colleagues and students.”

**Sharon (Sheri) Robertson**  
Associate Vice President  
for Academic Services

## Flexible, Streamlined Credit Policy Development and Review

Before NOVA approves any new CLEP or other advanced standing credits, or revises its current policies, the college's Credit for Prior Learning Committee meets and engages appropriate subject area faculty. The faculty reviews exam content to determine course equivalencies. The college's Curriculum Committee and the Administrative Council then approve the recommended credit policies. The process is streamlined and engages key stakeholders. Most importantly, this creates consistency and standardization across all six NOVA campuses, so every student has an equal opportunity to take advantage of CLEP and other credit-earning programs.

A positive byproduct of the committee's work is that a growing number of educators throughout the NOVA system become aware of CLEP and other programs, and they spread the word among colleagues and students, building awareness and interest in the program.

## CLEP Opportunities Are Prominently Featured in the NOVA Catalog and the Advising Environment

NOVA's CLEP policies and available credit equivalencies are featured in its catalog — positioned at the front of the publication so they're easy to find. The Academic Services team also "socializes" CLEP credit opportunities consistently in their work with teaching faculty, who also serve as student advisers, particularly during advising workshops with staff.



... there are countless students who would benefit from the opportunities that CLEP offers to demonstrate their competency in a variety of subject areas. I think there is a misconception about how transferable these credits are, but they are widely accepted (especially in most adult-friendly programs). In a world where there are many opportunities to gain knowledge via the workplace, MOOCs, and other sources, CLEP provides a means for people to demonstrate competency in a recognizable and articulated way. It is an exceptional opportunity for many students, especially adults."

**Christina Hubbard**

Associate Director, Adult Career Pathways

### Student Stories. Student Successes

Jason, an active duty soldier, took courses on and off during his eight years of active military service. As his separation date approached, it was clear he would not complete his associate degree before he completed his tour of duty. Jason knew he would exit the military in one of the most highly educated regions in the U.S. and that, without a degree, he would be at a competitive disadvantage in starting his post-military career. Counselors at NOVA worked with Jason to combine CLEP and other credits along with strategic course work so that he could graduate with his associate degree in the same month he ended his military service.

## Outreach to Active Military, Veterans, and Other Key Segments of the Student Universe

The Credit for Prior Learning team works closely with NOVA's Office of Military Services and a dedicated team of Veterans Benefit Advisors, a group of specially trained advisors who focus on the unique needs of retired members of the U.S. military. In addition to certifying VA benefits, these specialists are also knowledgeable about the CLEP program so that they can share information and opportunities with this highly valued group of college students. And when working with NOVA's career and technical faculty members, the Academic Services team brings the manual and actively works with these college departments to keep current with new opportunities to award credits for prior learning in specialized technical fields. This is particularly important for NOVA's sizable group of adult learners who are looking for ways to complete their degrees as efficiently as possible.

Christina Hubbard, NOVA's associate director of adult career pathways, offered this insightful recommendation, "I recommend establishing and growing advising programs dedicated to adult learners. These programs can develop expertise in looking for and helping students take advantage of credit for prior learning opportunities and can help students accelerate their degree completion. For schools where specialized adult programs are not an option, it is critical for annual training to be offered to keep testing opportunities at the forefront of advisers' knowledge base."

### Student Stories. Student Successes

NOVA has worked with thousands of students who were able to accelerate their studies thanks to CLEP language testing. CLEP is recommended as a "matter of course" by members of the NOVA Adult Career Pathways team for native speakers of the languages for which there are CLEP exams. In addition, NOVA frequently recommends that students who have foreign credits that transfer as electives or have a mismatch in credit counts take CLEP exams to meet NOVA requirements.

## Student Stories. Student Successes

Veronica worked as a family services assistant in a Virginia school district and set her sights on a career as a speech pathologist. At NOVA, she pursued an associate degree in general studies with plans to transfer to a four-year university to complete her undergraduate work as rapidly as possible. Veronica struggled with math and was at risk of losing her financial aid due to unsatisfactory academic progress issues. Her NOVA Adult Career Pathways counselor suggested a CLEP exam in Spanish to improve her academic standing. Veronica took advantage of this opportunity and was then able to eventually complete her math requirement successfully and earn elective credits, completing her associate degree as planned.

## Executive Summary

Serving more than 75,000 students, Northern Virginia Community College has long emphasized opportunities to take advantage of credit for prior learning to help adult students complete courses and degrees efficiently and affordably.

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## NOVA Best Practices at a Glance

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- A comprehensive manual that details accepted CLEP credits and course alignments and supports a consistent policy across multiple campuses and departments.
- Efficient, streamlined review of new and/or changing course requirements and their impact on credits for prior learning.
- Focused outreach through the college catalog and face-to-face meetings and events with student advisers and faculty members.
- Specialized training and outreach to address unique student needs for military, career, and technical education and other student segments.
- Consistent outreach to subject area faculty members who often serve as both formal and informal student advisers.

For more information, visit [clep.collegeboard.org](http://clep.collegeboard.org).