

TRENDS

IN MARITIME HIGHER EDUCATION

Volume 12, Number 2

April 2015

Higher Education Expectations: The View from Grade 12

Highlights

Over 5,000 grade 12 students across 175 Maritime high schools responded to the Commission's 2014 online survey. Here's what they had to say about their expectations for the future:

- ⇒ The vast majority of Maritime grade 12 students plan to pursue PSE; nearly half are university-bound.
 - The higher the parents' formal education, the more likely students intend to study at university
 - Preparing for future career / acquiring skills top list of motivations for choosing university
- ⇒ "Take a Break" and "Work to Earn Money" top the list of reasons students choose not to pursue post-secondary education in the fall.
- ⇒ The higher the percentage of education costs students expect their parents to pay, the more likely they did not know the cost of tuition.
 - Reliance on parents to fund education is much more common among those students with the most highly educated parents.
- ⇒ Half of Maritime high school students expect to borrow to pay for university studies
- ⇒ Grade 12 students associate a high quality university education not just with aspects of work/career but also with personal growth and academic aspects.
- ⇒ The majority of students expect to use the skills/knowledge acquired and to find a job related to their program.

Introduction

The social, educational, and economic benefits of pursuing a post-secondary education (PSE), include expanded knowledge, skills development, life experience, higher annual incomes, higher lifetime earnings, and lower unemployment risk. Maritime high school students and their parents must weigh the personal time commitment and financial costs of pursuing post-secondary studies and make important decisions about whether to pursue PSE, and if so, which path to take. The MPHEC's survey of grade 12 students was designed to answer important questions about these students' plans and expectations.

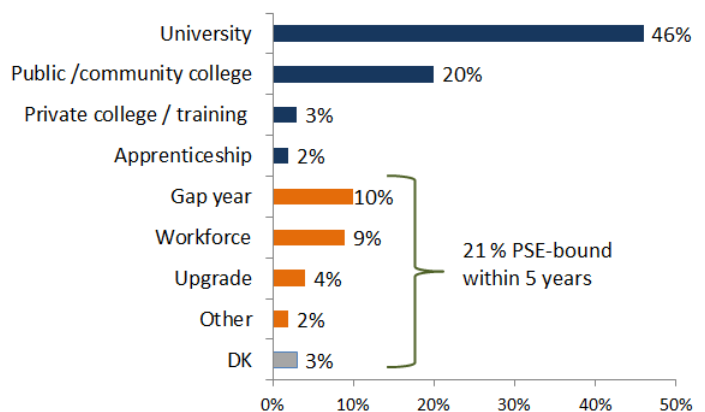
In an upcoming report, we will use these insights to assess the extent to which these students' expectations are likely to be met through comparison to the latest data on graduate outcomes (Class of 2012), measures of student progress based on university administrative data, and various other sources.

Vast majority of Maritime grade 12 students plan to pursue PSE; nearly half are university-bound

Grade 12 students were asked, "This fall, what do you think you are most likely to do?". Their answers revealed that post-secondary education is the primary goal for seven-in-ten, with the largest proportion (46%) intending to study at university. This is nearly double the combined total of all other post-secondary paths. Further, there are no significant differences across the provinces in the percentage of students saying they will pursue a university education.

Three-in-ten of all students have different plans for the fall, with most saying they plan to enter the workforce or take a gap year to explore their options. When these students were then asked, "Do you think you will enroll in a postsecondary program at some point in the next 5 years?", more than three-quarters said they definitely or probably would. Taken as a whole, then, 92% of all 2014 Maritime grade 12 students intend to pursue post-secondary education within 5 years.

Maritime grade 12 students' destination fall 2014

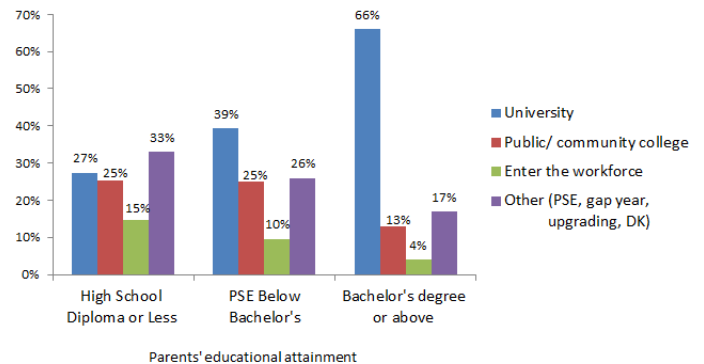


The higher the parents' formal education, the more likely students intend to study at university

A student's family educational background has a strong influence on their deciding whether or not to attend university. Among several other choices, such as teachers, guidance counsellors, friends and media, students were more than twice as likely to cite their parents (56%) as having a big impact on their decision-making to attend university. Furthermore, students from the most highly educated families (59%) were more likely than those whose parents had a high school diploma or less (47%) to say their parents had a big impact.

What is the impact of that influence? The higher the parents' formal education ⁽¹⁾, the more likely students intend to study at university: 66% of students whose parents have a Bachelor's degree or higher intend to go to university compared to 39% whose parents' education is below a Bachelor's, and 27% whose parents have a high school diploma or less.

Maritime grade 12 students' expected destination fall 2014 by parents' educational attainment



Preparing for future career / acquiring skills top list of motivations for choosing university

Seven-in-ten university-bound Maritime high school students say they are making that choice largely because they believe they need to prepare for a future career (31%), to acquire specific skills and knowledge for a future job (23%), or to have a chance to earn a good salary (15%). For about one-quarter of students, the choice to go to university is motivated primarily by thoughts of greater learning opportunities, a greater understanding of the world, and an experience of university life. Among these students, job/career related reasons are often given as the second- or third-most important reasons.

How do the top reasons given differ between the university-bound and those destined for other types of PSE?

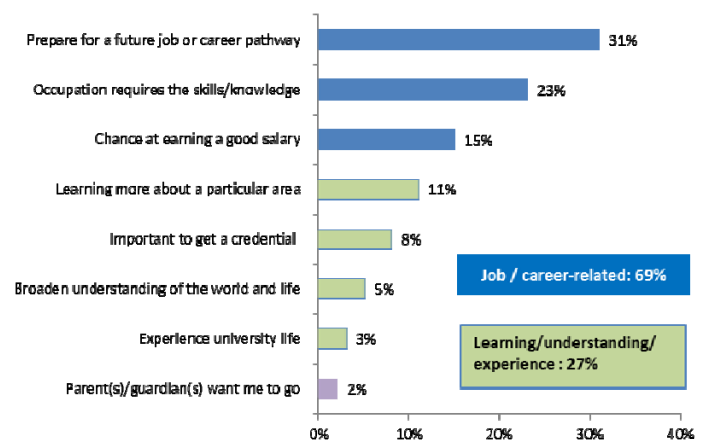
Like their university-bound peers (69%), those who say they will go to public/community college in the fall are most likely to say the most important reasons for their decision are career/job-related (57%); however, within that broad category, the college-bound (19%) are significantly less likely than the university-bound (31%) to say their most important reason is to prepare for a future career; there were no significant differences in the percentage motivated by acquiring specific skills and knowledge for a future job (24%, vs. 23%), or to have a chance to earn a good salary (14%, vs. 15%).

Those planning to go to a private college (11%) or begin an apprenticeship (7%) were less likely than their university- or

public college-bound peers to say they were motivated by preparing for future job/career, and more likely (20-21%) than university- or college-bound students to say their top reason was interest in learning more about a particular area.

For the private college-bound, the most popular motivation (29%) was that the future occupation requires the skills/knowledge of the program of choice.

Most important reasons for choosing University



Program expectations (university-bound students):

- Eight-in-ten students expect to complete their degree within four years
- Nine-in-ten expect to study full-time
- While studying, 57% expect to work part-time, and 3% full-time; the remainder are evenly divided among those who do not plan to work (20%) and those who don't know if they will or not (21%).

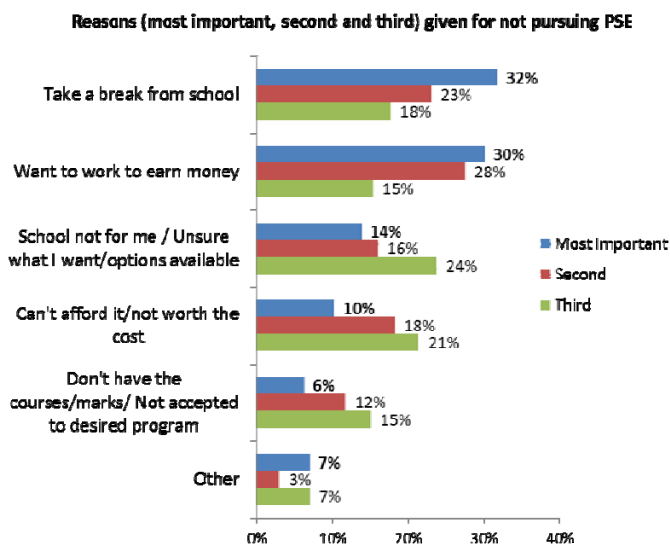
“Take a Break” and “Work to Earn Money” top list of reasons students choose not to pursue post-secondary education in the fall

Among the students who have decided not to pursue post-secondary studies in the fall (those who said they are upgrading high school were not asked the question), one-third said they wanted to take a break from school, while another third said wanting to work to earn money was the most important reason. Reasons tied to not having the appropriate qualifications or requirements for PSE, not having enough information, and affordability/value exist, but are much less often top-of-mind for high school students.

Taking a break from school or wanting to earn money are also prominent secondary motivations for many high school students who choose not to pursue a PSE path in the fall of 2014. This is particularly true for those who say they can't afford PSE, among whom 40% want to work to earn money, and 23% want to take a break.

Among those who decided not to pursue PSE studies in the fall of 2014, but said they definitely or probably would pursue PSE at some point within 5 years, the top reasons for doing so include the need they see in the future for more education to pre-

pare for a career or a job (53%), and the opportunity to have a chance at earning a good income (44%). They also feel they will have a better idea of what they want to study by then (41%).



The higher the percentage of education costs students expect their parents to pay, the more likely they did not know the cost of tuition.

Fully one quarter of university-bound students said they did not know how much tuition fees would cost. This compares to 36% of public college and 30% of private college-bound students.

The university-bound students who did report an amount, however, have a very accurate idea of tuition fees. Comparing the amounts reported by students and the actual full-time tuition fees at the institution they plan to attend reveals very little discrepancy.

What accounts for these two very different groups of students? Interestingly, knowledge of tuition fees appears directly correlated to the extent to which students expect parental support: the higher the percentage of education costs the student expects their parents to pay, the more likely they reported “Don’t know” when asked the expected tuition fees.

Among university-bound students, the median tuition fee amount reported was \$7,100. Students expected to pay an additional \$1,000 for books and supplies, and \$6,000 for room and board. In total, grade 12 students expect to pay a median of approximately \$14,000 for the first year of their program.

Reliance on parents to fund education is much more common among those students with the most highly educated parents

To pay for their education, 52% of students say they will rely on their parents, while another one-in-three cite the top source of funds as government student loans. 29% say their top source will be merit-based awards.

Reliance on parents to fund education is much more common among those students with the most highly educated parents (64%) compared to those whose parents have PSE below a Bachelor’s (38%) or High School diploma or less (37%).

How much do students expect parents to contribute? It varies with their parents’ education level; 43% of students whose parents have a Bachelor’s degree or higher expect their parents to cover between half to the entire cost of their university studies. This is double the expectation of students whose parents have PSE less than a Bachelor’s (23%) or a High School diploma or less (21%).

Half of Maritime high school students expect to borrow to pay for university studies.

Most university-bound high school students (50%) say they expect to borrow to pay for their post-secondary studies, though more than one-in-ten don’t know if they will or not. The expectation to borrow is particularly true of students whose parents have PSE less than a Bachelor’s degree (61%) or a High School Diploma or less (63%), compared to those with parents having a Bachelor’s degree or higher (42%).

For those who expect to borrow to pay for their university studies, government student loans is by far the largest single source to which they will turn. Four-in-ten of these students expect they will have to borrow at least \$30,000 while 46% think they will borrow less than that amount. Seven percent did not know how much they would need to borrow.

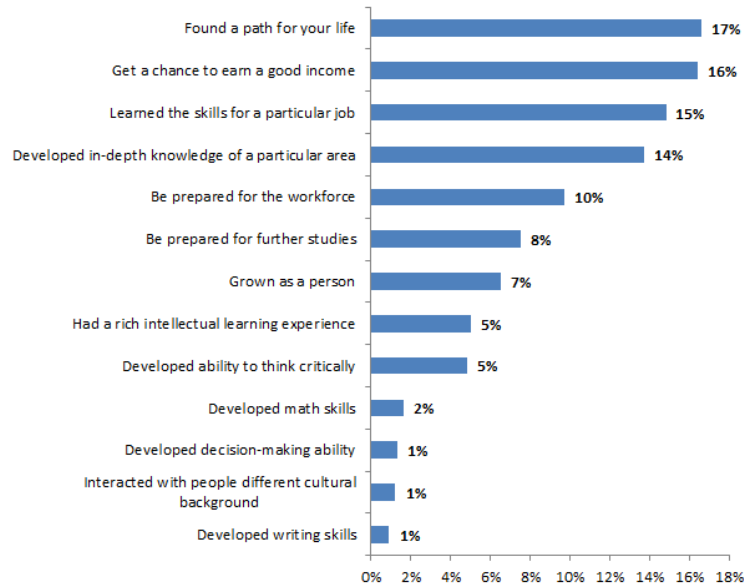
Nearly half (47%) think that repaying the money they borrowed would be somewhat difficult, while another 26% expect it will be very difficult.

Grade 12 students associate a high quality university education not just with aspects of work/career but also with personal growth and academic aspects

Maritime high school students identify a wide variety of work/career, academic, and personal growth outcomes that they expect from their university studies in order to feel they've had a high quality education.

Most important for them is that at the end of their university program they want to have found a path in their life, been given a chance to earn a good income, obtained the skills and knowledge for a specific occupation, and developed in-depth knowledge of a particular area.

"What is the most important thing you want to have once you've completed your program in order to feel you've had a high quality education?"

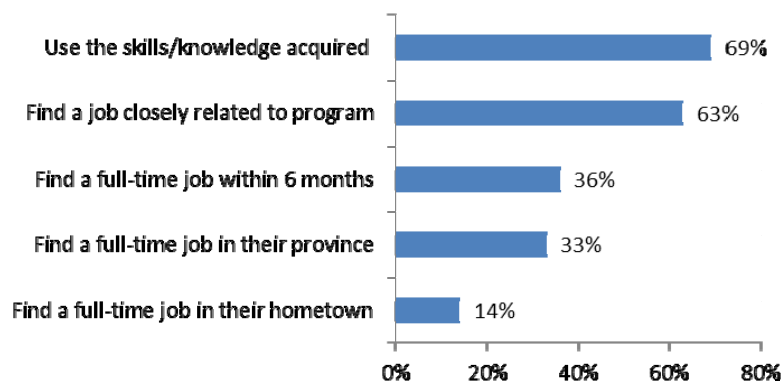


The majority of students expect to use the skills/knowledge acquired and to find a job related to their program

Maritime high school students who intend to pursue university studies expect to see specific employment outcomes once they have completed all of their education. More than six-in-ten said they definitely expect to find a job that is closely related to what they learned in their program, and to use the skills and knowledge acquired from their program.

When it comes to finding a full-time job soon after completing their education, or one locally, expectations are lower. One third expect to find a full-time job within 6 months; the same proportion expect to find that job in their province. Far fewer (14%) expect to find a job in their hometown.

What university-bound students "definitely expect" to be able to do once they've completed all their education



Conclusions

Over nine-in-ten Maritime grade 12 students plan to pursue post-secondary education, if not in the fall after graduation, then at some point within the next five years after they have taken a break to explore other options and/or earn money. A university education is the most popular option, followed by community college. Although the prime motivation for the university-bound varies from career to personal growth to academic reasons, most students do expect their credential to set them up for a smooth transition to the work world.

Students have a picture of how their university education will play out, with the majority believing they will finish within four years. About half expect to borrow, and of that group, nearly four-in-ten think they will borrow more than \$30,000.

Several key findings in this study have also pointed to the strong influence that parents have on their children's decisions about whether to pursue PSE in the fall, and if so, which type. The strong links to these decisions, as well as to students' expectations and awareness of educational costs, are strongly tied to the level of education parents themselves have attained. Students whose parents have a university degree are more likely to: say they plan to go to university, to rely on their parents to pay for their education (and perhaps as a consequence, have less knowledge of the costs) and less likely to say they expect to borrow.

These findings raise many important questions, such as:

- **How many students will realize their intentions to earn a university degree?**
- **Will that credential meet their expectations, preparing them for a career in which they can use their skills, or providing opportunities for personal growth?**
- **What does the strong impact of parents' educational attainment mean for equality of access to all PSE destinations for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background?**

In an upcoming report, the Commission will address these questions by comparing these expectations to the experiences of the Maritime university Class of 2012, as well as to other data sources.

What you should know about this study:

The survey was conducted by MQO Research on behalf of the Commission, and in collaboration with the departments of Education in the three Maritime provinces, between May 9—June 11, 2014 in 175 Maritime high schools. Surveys were administered online by participating schools, and were available in English and French. The total sample of 5,219 represents 25% of the total grade 12 population of 20,805. The margin of error for the survey is $\pm 1.4\%$, 19 times out of 20. All statistics presented have been generated from weighted data; data were weighted on the basis of school board within each province to adjust to proportional representation in the population.

⁽¹⁾ Parental educational attainment: These categories combine both parents' (or guardians') highest levels of education, and the category is assigned based on the highest level of education of the pair.





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