

# INTENTIONS OF MARITIME UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FOLLOWING GRADUATION:

## A SURVEY OF THE CLASS OF 2007

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS STUDY ...

**Project Partners:** New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, together with the Canadian Council on Learning, provided funding for this project; the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission was the managing partner. The project could not have been carried out without the support and work of the participating institutions.

The Strategic Counsel created the questionnaire in partnership with the MPHEC, conducted survey pre-testing, conducted the survey and prepared the detailed report.

**Population Studied:** Maritime university students expecting to graduate with a bachelor's degree in 2007 (n=12,004).

### Participating institutions are as follows:

Acadia University	Nova Scotia Agricultural College	Université Sainte-Anne
Cape Breton University	Nova Scotia College of Art and Design	Université de Moncton
Dalhousie University	St. Francis Xavier University	University of King's College
Mount Allison University	Saint Mary's University	University of New Brunswick
Mount Saint Vincent University	St. Thomas University	University of Prince Edward Island

**Survey:** The survey was conducted using a web-based questionnaire. Email invitations, each containing a unique URL for entry into the survey, were sent to all eligible students. The survey was conducted between March 12 and March 31, 2007.

**Sample:** A survey completion rate of 43% was achieved, resulting in a final sample of 5,128 respondents.

**Statistics:** The margin of error for the sample is  $\pm 1.04$  percentage points, 19 times out of 20. In all cases, the confidence level determining significance was set at 95%. Unless otherwise noted, all statistics presented have been generated from weighted data.

### Student Profile (based on data weighted to represent the population):

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female: 59%</b>	<b>Male: 41%</b>
<b>Prior Education</b>	First degree: 70%	Second degree or greater: 30%
<b>Program Orientation</b>	Liberal arts & sciences: 49%	Applied/professional: 51%

# INTENTIONS OF MARITIME UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FOLLOWING GRADUATION: A SURVEY OF THE CLASS OF 2007

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 12,000 Maritime university students were in their final weeks of a bachelor's degree in late March, 2007. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, together with the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission and the Canadian Council on Learning, joined in a partnership, with cooperation from the region's universities, to conduct a survey of these students in order to gain insight into attitudes toward, and plans for, pursuing further education, as well as preparedness for further studies and the workforce. The study also provides important information on student debt at graduation.

Highlighted below are the major findings from the study.

### KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ University programs meet most students' expectations.
- ❖ A majority (76%) of Maritime university students completing undergraduate degrees plan to return for further study; greater numbers of liberal arts & sciences (87%) than applied/professional (65%) students plan to return.
- ❖ Many liberal arts & sciences students who intend to pursue a second credential made this decision very early on (52% in their first year of study or earlier).
- ❖ The majority (60%) of students, plan to pursue a master's degree and many are attracted to master's programs outside the region.
- ❖ High debt (\$40,000+) reduces the likelihood that students plan to pursue further education.
- ❖ Student debt has increased 10% (2007 constant dollars) on average between 2003 and 2007.
- ❖ Family educational background does not affect a student's *intentions* for further study.
- ❖ The proportion of students from families where at least one parent has a bachelor's degree or greater continues to increase.
- ❖ The majority (73%) of Maritimers, and about one-quarter of students from outside the region, would like to stay in the region to live and work.

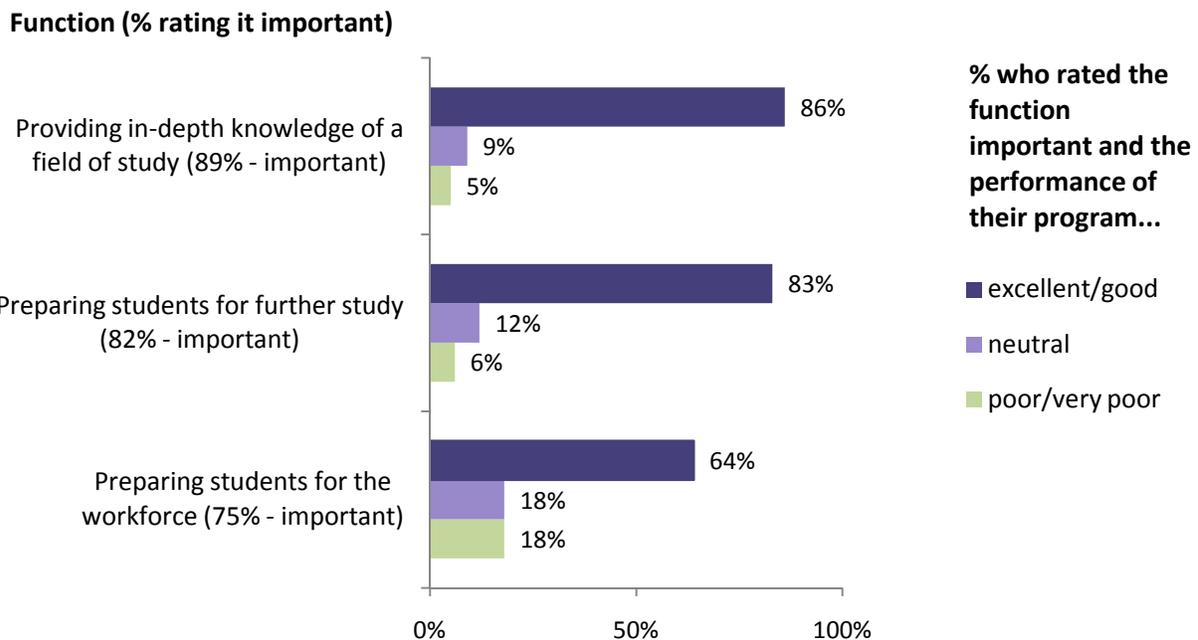
## UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS MEET MOST STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS

The vast majority (86%) of students are satisfied with their university education, and the evidence indicates that their educational expectations, for the most part, are being met by their program. Students were asked to rate the importance of seven functions of a university education (providing in-depth knowledge of a field of study; preparing students for further study; preparing students for the workforce; improving teamwork skills; improving oral and written communication skills; and improving critical thinking abilities). They were then asked to rate their university program in fulfilling each of these functions.

In this study, the extent to which university programs are meeting students' expectations is measured as the degree of the match between program performance and the importance attached to each function. The mismatch or gap is defined as that percentage of students who, though they identify the function as important, rate their program as poor in fulfilling it.

Students were more likely to attach importance to the functions that involve improving skills and providing knowledge, than the function to prepare students for the workforce. And for the most part, there is little mismatch across the functions: for six out of the seven, the gap between function importance and rating of performance ranged between 4-8%. Only for one function – preparing students for the workforce – was the gap larger, standing at 18%. An analysis of this group showed that liberal arts & sciences students completing their first degree were over-represented: of those who thought preparing students for the workforce was important, 23% thought their program did a poor job in fulfilling that function.

### Match between function importance and rating of university program in fulfilling that function



### MOST MARITIME UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PLAN TO RETURN FOR FURTHER STUDY

Three-quarters (76%) of students said they intend to continue their education. A significant determinant of whether or not they plan to return is program orientation<sup>1</sup>: 87% of students in liberal arts & sciences programs, and 65% of those in applied/professional programs, said they intended to return for further study<sup>2</sup>.

These findings dovetail with what has been learned from surveys of previous Maritime University graduating classes: at the two-year-out mark, graduates have returned in large numbers, with those from Liberal arts & sciences outnumbering two-to-one those from applied/professional programs<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Program orientation: students' major fields of study were categorized into one of two groups: liberal arts & sciences (focusing more on the development of general skills and intellectual education, and including such fields as biology, geography, history, and sociology) and applied/professional (focusing on practical education and training such as for a profession, including such fields as accounting, education, engineering and nursing). For a detailed list of the majors included in each category, see MPHEC. *Two Years On: A Survey of Class of 2003 Maritime University Graduates*. Fredericton, 2007. [http://www2.mphec.ca/english/pdfs/TwoYearsOn\\_GFU\\_2007En.pdf](http://www2.mphec.ca/english/pdfs/TwoYearsOn_GFU_2007En.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Applied/professional students make up 51%, and liberal arts & sciences students 49%, of the total sample.

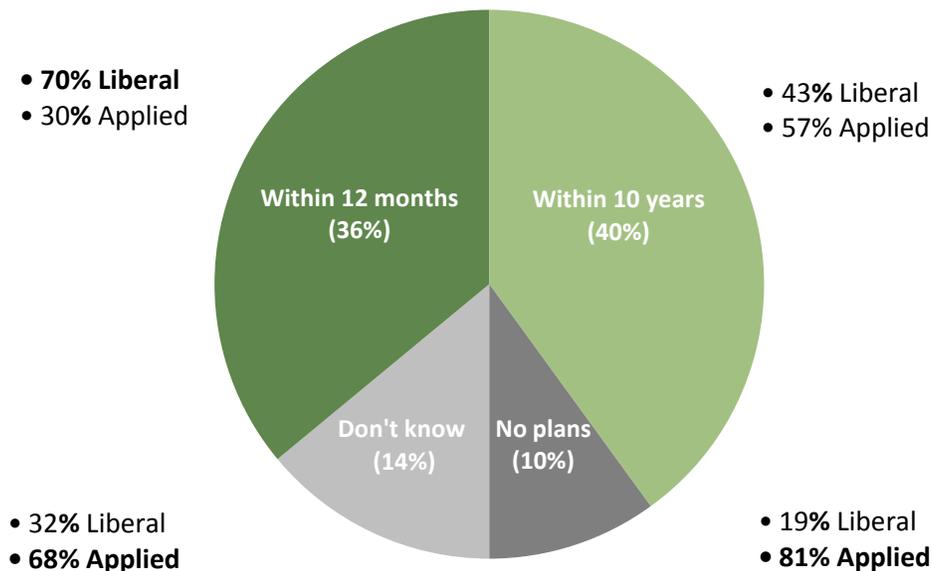
<sup>3</sup> Source: MPHEC Survey of the Class of 2003 in 2005 data file.

Looking more closely at the pattern of students' plans to return, 36% said they would do so within the next 12 months. Among those who had other plans for the year following graduation, four-in-ten said they anticipated pursuing another degree, diploma or certificate sometime within the next 10 years. One-in-ten do not plan to return, while a further 14% are undecided. Within each of these groups, distribution by program orientation tells an interesting story.

Students in applied/professional programs are ready to enter directly into a specific job or industry; wanting to begin their careers, they may be less inclined to resume studies. This helps to explain their overrepresentation among those who do not intend to return or are undecided.

Students in Liberal arts & sciences programs, on the other hand, are in programs which are not as clearly linked to the labour market. This helps to explain the fact that students in Liberal arts & sciences programs make up the majority of those who plan to return within 12 months, and that their motivation is largely employment/career related.

### Students' plans for returning for further study, with distribution by program orientation



### MANY LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES STUDENTS WHO INTEND TO PURSUE A SECOND CREDENTIAL MADE THIS DECISION VERY EARLY ON

Liberal arts & science students make up 70% of those students who plan to return for further study within 12 months. Of these, slightly over half (52%) reported that they had made the decision to do so either before they enrolled (34%) or in the first two years of their current program (17%).

Those who made early decisions were very likely to indicate that reasons related to employment played a key part in their decision making - 94% said that "to get their job of choice", and three-quarters, "to get a better paying job", described their reasons well.

Interestingly, among those liberal arts & science students who decided to continue with further education in the third year of their program or later (49%), employment related reasons remain popular, but a greater percentage said that not being prepared to make career decisions described their reasons well (28% vs. 12% of early deciders).

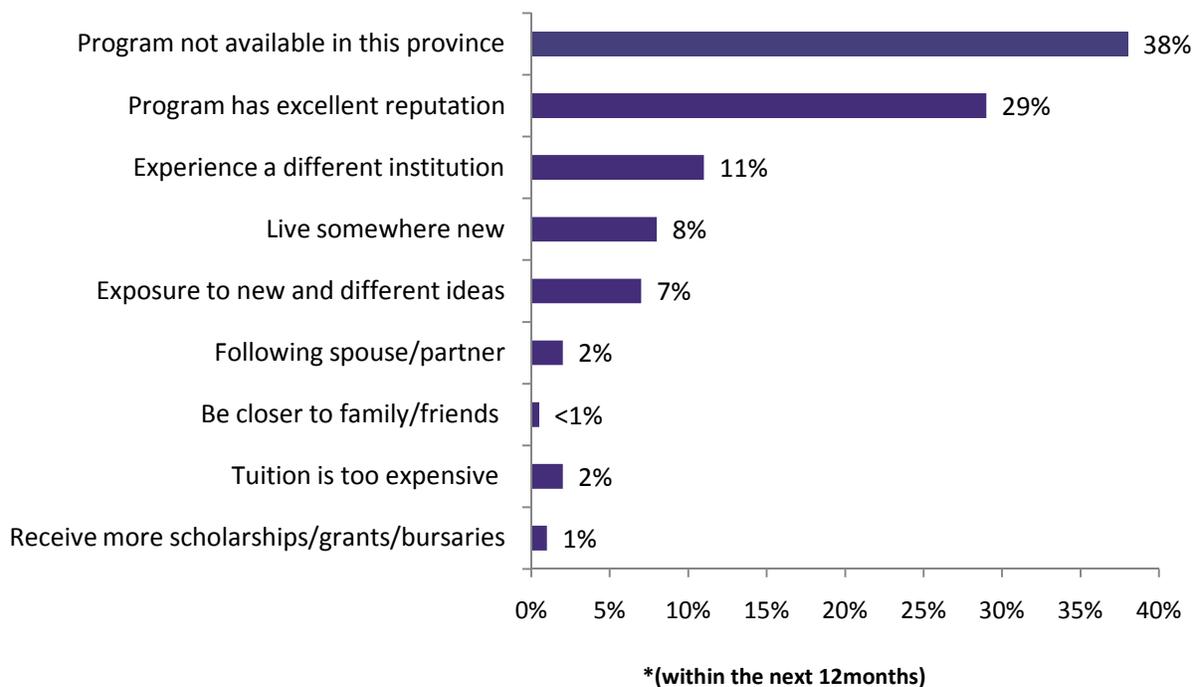
## THE MAJORITY OF STUDENTS PLAN TO PURSUE A MASTER’S DEGREE

The majority of those who plan to continue intend to complete a master’s degree (60%; considering the entire graduating class, 46% intend to pursue a master’s). A second bachelor’s degree is also popular with 21% planning further study at this level. Among those intending to pursue a master’s degree, business administration, education and health were among the most popular fields.

## STUDENTS ARE ATTRACTED TO MASTER’S PROGRAMS OUTSIDE THE REGION

Of those who plan to return to study at the master’s level within the next 12 months, 54% plan to study outside the region. To further explore the reasons behind this choice, we excluded students who had attended high school outside the Maritimes in order to account for any special knowledge/awareness of programs “back home” (outside the region). It turns out that among students originally from the Maritimes, the majority said either that the reason they chose to pursue their master’s program outside the region was because the program was not available in the Maritimes (38%), or the program had an excellent reputation (29%). A further 18% wanted to experience a new learning environment – either a new institution, or new and different ideas. Their peers from outside the region tended to give a similar pattern of reasons, with the exception that more (18% vs. < 1%) said they wanted to be close to friends and/or family and fewer (20% vs. 38%) said the program was not available in the Maritimes.

**Main reason for planning\* to pursue master’s degree outside region, among students from the Maritimes**



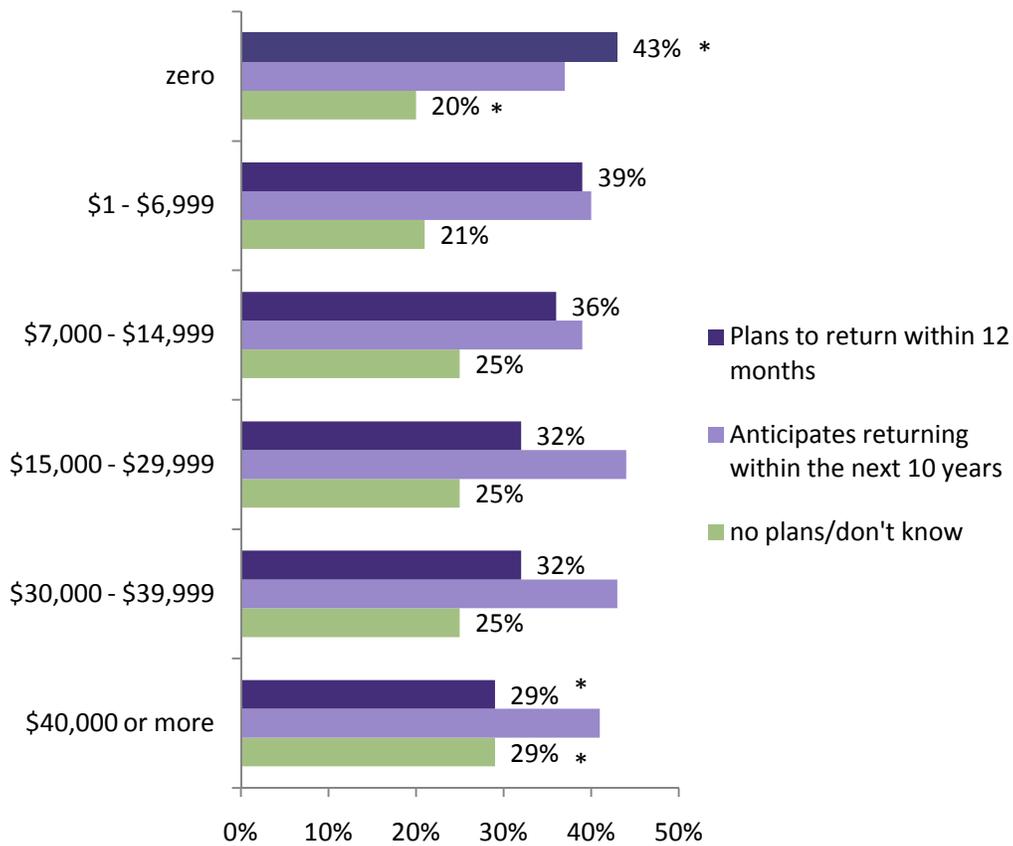
When asked their opinion about the caliber of programs in the province they currently study in, greater numbers agreed that “this province has some of the best undergraduate university programs in Canada”, (62%) than agreed that “this province has some of the best graduate university programs in Canada” (35%). In addition, just over one-third (35%) agreed with the statement “universities in this province just don’t offer the range of programs of some universities in other parts of Canada”. These statistics varied among the three provinces, and tended to reflect program offerings in that province.

Interestingly, one-quarter of students stated they did not know whether their province has some of the best graduate programs, while fully 45% were unaware of community college programs. This suggests there is room to improve students’ awareness of the post-secondary education options open to them in the region.

### **HIGH DEBT (\$40,000+) REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD STUDENTS PLAN TO PURSUE FURTHER EDUCATION**

Compared to students who owe nothing, a debt of \$40,000 or more, significantly reduces (by 13 percentage points) the likelihood of a student planning to return for further study within 12 months, and increases the likelihood they anticipate either not returning or are undecided (by nine percentage points).

**Plans for further study, by amount owing just before graduation (March 2007), all sources combined**



**\*statistically significant (p<0.001)**

## STUDENT DEBT HAS INCREASED 10% (2007 CONSTANT DOLLARS) ON AVERAGE BETWEEN 2003 AND 2007

While the proportion who owe money for their education has not changed appreciably, compared to the Class of 2003, those who are about to graduate with their first bachelor's degree in 2007 and currently have debt to finance that education, owed on average 10% more (2007 constant dollars). The proportion who owed at least \$40,000 increased by 14 percentage points between the two cohorts.

Student debt statistics, Class of 2007 and Class of 2003

Students with/completing first degree	% who owe* for education	Among those who owe*...		
		Percent owing \$40,000+	Mean owing	Mean owing (constant 2007 \$)
Class of 2003	65%	16%	\$23,008	\$24,976
Class of 2007	68%	30%	\$27,486	\$27,486
Difference	+3 pts	+14pts	+19%	+10%

\*Class of 2003: based on amount borrowed to finance education; Class of 2007: based on amount owing just before graduation

## FAMILY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND DOES NOT AFFECT A STUDENT'S INTENTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

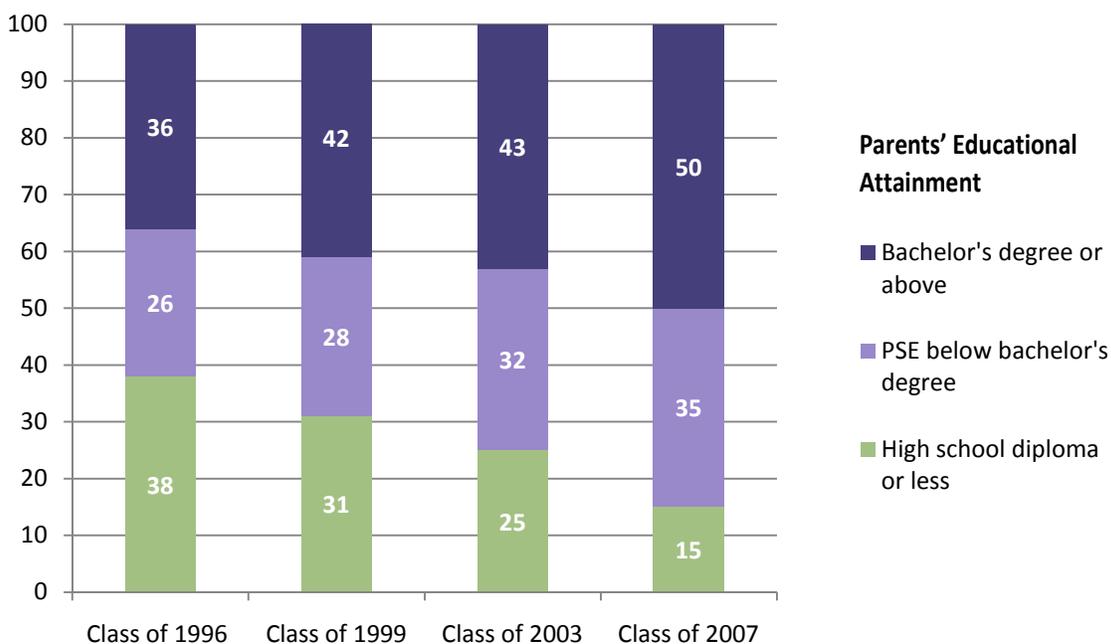
Surveys of Maritime university graduates conducted at two and five years post-graduation indicate that family educational background influences whether or not a graduate returned for further study, with those whose parents had attained a bachelor's degree or greater more likely to have returned. In this study of students who were about to graduate, at the time the survey was conducted, parents' educational attainment did not have a measurable effect on a student's *intention* to return for further study. Whether this discrepancy predicts that the intentions of some students will go unrealized due to a student's background is uncertain at this point; the MPHEC's planned follow-up survey with the Class of 2007 in two years' time will be able to resolve this question. However, it is noteworthy that significantly fewer students whose parents had attained a high school education or less (5% vs. 17% of students whose parents had attained a bachelor's degree or greater) said they will depend on parents to fund their next program of study; perhaps this differential in resources may eventually make a difference in the likelihood of returning for some.

## THE PROPORTION OF STUDENTS FROM FAMILIES WHERE AT LEAST ONE PARENT HAS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR GREATER CONTINUES TO INCREASE

The proportion of students whose parents' educational attainment is a bachelor's degree or above has increased seven percentage points over the last four years, while the proportion whose parents have attained a high school diploma or less decreased 10 percentage points.

As noted in the previous graduate survey report<sup>4</sup>, there are likely a few reasons underpinning this shift in the students' socioeconomic profile. First, the educational attainment profile of the general population has been shifting, with higher proportions attaining higher levels of education. Second, there is an increasing number of mixed-education partnerships – for example, of those students whose mothers have a high school diploma, 55% also said their father had a high school diploma (as compared to 65% of members of the Class of 2003) and the remaining 44% have fathers who had at least some post-secondary education. Finally, with the current healthy economy both across the country and in this region, it may be that those whose parents have attained a high school diploma or less may be more likely to currently be in the work force, seeing first hand in their own families the possibilities for work without a post-secondary education.

**Parents' educational attainment distribution (%) by graduating class**



Sources: MPHEC graduate surveys, Classes of 1996, 1999, 2003

### **THE MAJORITY OF MARITIMERS, AND ABOUT ONE-QUARTER OF STUDENTS FROM OUTSIDE THE REGION, WOULD LIKE TO STAY IN THE REGION TO LIVE AND WORK**

All graduates were asked about their plans relating to employment following their education (i.e., their 2007 degree and any subsequent education); specifically, they were asked in which province(s) or country(ies) they planned to work or seek employment. Close to three-quarters (73%) who had attended high school in the Maritimes, and one-quarter (22%) of those originally from outside the region, said they would choose a Maritime province as their first choice place to work. Proximity of family (47%) and a desire to live in the province (21%) are the most popular reasons these students chose a Maritime province; employment-related reasons were given by 10%. Compared to previous graduate survey findings, these intentions agree well with recent patterns of graduate mobility. Actual outcomes will be examined in the planned two year follow-up survey.

<sup>4</sup> Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission 2007. *Two Years On: A Survey of Class of 2003 Maritime University Graduates*. MPHEC: Fredericton.