

# Help choosing a university in the Atlantic

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Below is information that has been gathered from professors, alumni and the universities themselves to describe some of the strengths and weaknesses of 12 universities in the Atlantic. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) informed coverage of the type of undergraduate education. But, most importantly, we spoke to real-life students about the good and bad of their university experience.

## **NEW BRUNSWICK**

### **Mount Allison University**

*All about undergrad*

Sackville

**Students:** 2,700

**Cost:** \$7,800

**Awards:** \$2.6-million

**Pro:** Exceptional access to profs

**Con:** Limited research opportunities

Mount Allison attracts more students from other provinces than any other university. The draw? A superb liberal arts education that consistently ranks among the best for student-faculty interaction. Its intimate campus is known for the fine arts (featuring the oldest university art gallery in the country), and its business and science programs are growing. City slickers find tiny Sackville dull, but at least rent is cheap.

**Hotshot prof:** Colin Laroque, who has attracted international media attention for his research on what tree rings reveal about historical climate change, teaches an intensive field class in Jasper, Alta.

**Notable alumnus:** Renowned painter Mary Pratt was just celebrated in a retrospective at the The Rooms Provincial Art Gallery in St. John's that The Globe and Mail called "stunning."

**Students say:** "I recommend students visit to see if they can handle life in small town New Brunswick. Also: Be aware of the harsh Canadian winter."

– *Brynne Langford, second-year international relations*

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### **University of New Brunswick**

*Centuries old traditions*

Fredericton

**Students:** 11,000

**Cost:** \$6,900

**Awards:** \$6.5-million

**Pro:** Varsity Reds are defending champs of University Cup of hockey

**Con:** Mixed results on NSSE

Founded in 1785, UNB is littered with Georgian buildings that are especially picturesque when fall transforms the tree-lined boulevards into vivid reds and oranges. UNB's engineering faculty is highly regarded, especially the geomatics program, which claims a 100-per-cent employment rate and ties with the creators of Google Earth. But it's not all about engineering,

business and marine biology (all strong at UNB). Renaissance College is a tiny interdisciplinary enclave that offers 28 students each year a unique Oxford/Cambridge-like experience in a mansion just off campus.

**Hotshot prof:** Frank Collins, engineering professor, developed a week-long stress management course for incoming students that aims to emulate the most stressful time of an engineering student's first year.

**Notable alumnus:** Allison McCain, chair of McCain Foods Ltd., is the chancellor of University of New Brunswick.

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## St. Thomas University

*Small and intimate*

Fredericton

**Students:** 2,500

**Cost:** \$5,800

**Awards:** \$1.9-million

**Pro:** Lowest tuition in New Brunswick

**Con:** Buses don't run on Sundays

St. Thomas is a more intimate alternative to UNB. The universities share space, facilities and a students' union. St. Thomas students can even take classes from UNB. Yet St. Thomas distinguishes itself with its strong liberal arts tradition; students are encouraged to study the Great Books, such as Dante's *Inferno* and Homer's *Iliad*. Despite its old-fashioned and Catholic roots, the university has a reputation for its parties. Administration banned alcohol from one residence building and brought in a strict code of conduct after a 2010 alcohol-related student death.

**Hotshot prof:** Rusty Bittermann received the Canadian Historical Association's Hilda Neatby Award in 2007 for the best article written on women's history in English.

**Notable alumnus:** Author David Adams Richards has won the Governor General's award in both fiction and nonfiction categories.

**Students say:** "Fredericton is a great area, very small, but lots going on. The culture is very artsy."

– *Liam McGuire, recent journalism graduate*

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## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

### University of Prince Edward Island

*Island university*

Charlottetown

**Students:** 4,600

**Cost:** \$6,400

**Awards:** \$5.4-million

**Pro:** Across the street from huge farmer's market

**Con:** University Avenue's chain stores and restaurants

Students complain that UPEI feels like high school, but there are benefits to its small size and tight-knit community. UPEI can rightly boast about offering an engaging educational experience with lots of professor interaction, according to NSSE. The student body is changing as domestic enrolment falls and the university focuses on recruiting abroad (international enrolment grew by 13 per cent last year).

**Hotshot prof:** William Whelan, Canada Research Chair in Biomedical Optics, is researching how to use light and sound to find, treat and monitor prostate cancer in hopes of developing less invasive treatment with fewer complications.

**Notable alumnus:** Trent Henry is chairman and CEO of Ernst & Young.

**Students say:** "UPEI has everything I wanted out of university: it has the riotous parties, the pride in athletics, world-class teachers and more."

– *Ryan Mccarvill, third-year business*

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## NOVA SCOTIA

### Acadia University

*Small is beautiful*

Wolfville

**Students:** 4,300 students

**Cost:** \$6,800 or \$7,800 (out of province)

**Awards:** \$3.2-million

**Pro:** Free bus to the ski hill

**Con:** Mediocre ski hill

Tiny Wolfville (population: 4,269) is your classic university town. Ivy grows thick on the brick walls of quaint buildings, the town is home to as many students as permanent residents, and football is almost a religion. And don't forget the parties. Linda Frum's classic university guide recommends bringing your Animal House soundtrack, and students say her advice is not outdated. Although Western schools such as UNBC and Lethbridge have begun challenging the East Coast's dominance when it comes to undergrad-focused education, Acadia remains one of the strongest liberal arts schools in the country. Its biology program is a highlight.

**Hotshot prof:** Jon Saklofske, literature professor, recently published a paper about a multiplayer video game for editing scholarly works.

**Notable alumnus:** Peter MacKay Was named the federal Minister Of Justice and Attorney General in the most recent cabinet shuffle.

**Students say:** "You'll see someone you know whenever you go out and everyone always has a smile."

– *Lindsay Doucet, fourth-year mathematics*

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### Cape Breton University

*Training leaders in oil and gas*

Sydney

**Students:** 2,900

**Cost:** \$5,100 or \$6,200 (out of province)

**Awards:** \$1.2-million

**Pro:** Access to professors

**Con:** Lack of co-op and internship opportunities

CBU exists to serve its community, which explains why it responded to Atlantic Canada's growing oil and gas industry by developing programs in petroleum technology and engineering. CBU was the first university in Canada to offer a bachelor of arts in community studies, in which students learn through community projects. With low entry requirements – a high-school average of 65 per cent qualifies applicants for most programs – CBU is dedicated to accessibility.

**Hotshot prof:** Allen Britten, chemistry professor, has mentored students conducting field work analyzing soil and water in India.

**Notable alumnus:** Stephen Eagar starred with his brothers, Jeff and Chris, in the Gemini-nominated television program *Which Way To...*

**Students say:** "What I like most about Cape Breton University is the sense of community – that feeling that you're connected in almost a patriotic sense to the university itself."

– *Brennan Boudreau, third-year political science*

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## Dalhousie University

*Cozy school in foggy Halifax*

Halifax

**Students:** 18,000

**Cost:** \$7,300

**Awards:** \$12-million

**Pro:** Huge intramural participation

**Con:** Few rez spaces available after first year and no nearby "student ghetto"

Dalhousie offers the perks of a large, research-intensive university while maintaining a small-campus feel. The ocean sciences department is internationally renowned and attracts leading researchers such as Douglas Wallace, who holds the Canada Chair for Ocean Science and Technology. Although known as a "science school," students can also take classes at Dalhousie's eccentric, artsy cousin University of King's College.

**Hotshot prof:** Jeff Dahn was the 2009 recipient of the Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching medal awarded by the Canadian Association of Physicists.

**Notable alumnus:** After completing a degree at Dalhousie at 14, Erik Demaine went on to become the youngest professor ever at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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## University of King's College

*Philosophy on the Atlantic*

Halifax

**Students:** 1,200

**Cost:** \$6,800

**Awards:** \$800,000

**Pro:** Tight-knit community

**Con:** Lack of employment opportunities

Founded in 1789, King's is one of English Canada's oldest universities and its 18th-century sensibilities remain. Every month everyone on campus dresses in their Sunday finest for a shared meal that begins with grace recited in Latin. This intimate campus community has its

pluses, but students say it feels like a “fish bowl.” Hotshot prof: Stephen D. Snobelen, a historian of science, co-founded the Newton Project Canada that publishes Sir Issac Newton’s lesser-known writings.

**Notable alumnus:** Miriam Toews, author of bestselling novels including *A Complicated Kindness*, studied journalism.

**Students say:** “For students without a clear direction of study, the Foundation Year Programme is a great [and challenging] introduction to the humanities. One warning: Be prepared to write – a lot.” – *Quinn Harrington, fourth-year philosophy*

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## Mount Saint Vincent University

*Liberal arts meets social justice*

Halifax

**Students:** 4,000

**Cost:** \$6,600

**Awards:** \$1.7-million

**Pro:** Strong programs in science communication and public relations

**Con:** Commute to downtown bars and cafes

Perched on a hill overlooking the Bedford Basin, it’s not unusual to spot deer grazing on the campus of MSVU. Originally founded by nuns to support women’s higher education in 1873, there are now three female students for every male. MSVU’s founding mission has evolved to promote accessibility for all students, and it offers flexible programs and schedules to 1,000 mature students.

**Hotshot prof:** Patricia Williams was awarded a \$1-million grant by Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) in 2010 for her Activating Policy Change for Community Food Security research program.

**Notable alumnus:** Judge Corinne Sparks was the first African-Canadian to serve on the bench when appointed to the Nova Scotia family court judge in 1987.

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## St. Francis Xavier University

*School of the ring*

Antigonish

**Students:** 4,700

**Cost:** \$6,400 or \$7,400 (out of province)

**Awards:** \$2-million

**Pro:** Every grad receives the recognizable X-Ring

**Con:** Privacy is elusive in a college town of 5,000 With more than half the student body living on campus, St. FX benefits from a close-knit community, even if rivalries between residences can get nasty. The university’s average first-year class size of 27 is evidence of its pledge to be all about undergrads. St. FX is in the midst of a \$144-million, 10-year infrastructure overhaul, which included the construction of a new business school building. But the campus

facelift became controversial this spring when the university announced layoffs to address a \$4.5-million deficit.

**Hotshot prof:** David Risk created a greenhouse-gas detecting probe for soil samples that is being sold by Forerunner Research.

**Notable alumnus:** Brian Mulroney is a former prime minister of Canada.

**Students say:** “St. FX is always renovating and upgrading, making the student experience even better.”

– *Jade Anema, second-year engineering*

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## Saint Mary’s University

*Nova Scotia’s connection to China*

Halifax

**Students:** 7,400

**Cost:** \$6,000

**Awards:** \$5-million

**Pro:** No class on Fridays

**Con:** Less academic prestige than neighbouring universities

Saint Mary’s has fostered ties with China since the early 1980s, and this influence is apparent; more than a quarter of students are from abroad, mostly from China, and the recently opened Confucius Institute promotes Chinese language, culture and commerce. With 35 per cent of undergraduate students enrolled in the Sobey School of Business, finance and marketing talk tends to dominate conversation at the Gorsebrook Lounge. SMU students say they are friendlier than their “snobbish” rivals at Dalhousie, just a few streets away.

**Hotshot prof:** Adam Sarty, physics professor and 3M teaching fellow, regularly conducts fun explosive in-class demonstrations that become popular on YouTube.

**Notable alumnus:** Nancy Knowlton is the former president and CEO of Smart Technologies, developer of the Smart Board interactive whiteboard.

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## NEWFOUNDLAND

## Memorial University of Newfoundland

*Newfoundland’s engine*

St. John’s

**Students:** 18,000 students

**Cost:** \$3,100

**Awards:** \$3.2-million

**Pro:** Cheapest tuition outside Quebec

**Con:** Ranked poorly on active and collaborative learning in NSSE

The largest university in Atlantic Canada, Memorial is deeply connected to the ocean through its Marine Institute which offers programs such as the joint diploma of technology and bachelor of technology in ocean mapping. Memorial is proud of being the only anglophone university to offer studies in folklore at the bachelor, master’s and PhD level. The university bar The Breezeway used to be the centre of campus social life, but a \$160,000 deficit has called its

future into question. Luckily, campus is only minutes from downtown where students can enjoy the spirited and rowdy nightlife on George Street.

**Hotshot prof:** Maureen Volk, associate dean of music, won the 2011 Association of Atlantic Universities Distinguished Teaching Award.

**Notable alumnus:** Danny Williams served as premier of Newfoundland and Labrador for seven years before stepping down in December of 2010.

**Students say:** “My experiences with university-organized volunteer opportunities and the study abroad opportunity provided by the Harlow Campus enhanced my studies immensely.”  
– *Candace Simms, final-year political science*