



ASSOCIATION OF
ATLANTIC
UNIVERSITIES

ASSOCIATION DES
UNIVERSITÉS DE
L'ATLANTIQUE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HALIFAX, NS – Nearly eight months of uncertainty generated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on university operations is reflected in the Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) 2020-21 Preliminary Survey of Enrolments.

Full-time enrolment (undergraduate and graduate) declined by -1.3% (-1,023) students year-over-year while **full-time visa students** declined -6.6% (-1,264) during the same period.

“Not a surprise” is how AAU Chair Allister Surette, Recteur, Université Sainte-Anne, summarized the declines in domestic and international enrolments. “Once our universities were past the immediate response to the pandemic during the Spring semester and began planning in most cases for delivery of online learning in the fall semester, some declines were expected.”

“However,” noted M. Surette, “the decline in domestic students is not nearly as significant as initially projected. In fact, many of our universities reported incremental increases in total enrolment.”

National and international travel restrictions and the temporary closure of visa processing offices worldwide, seriously affected the enrolment of international students in all but six universities (Atlantic School of Theology, Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University, Mount Allison University, University of New Brunswick and University of Prince Edward Island).

“The importance of visa students to the internationalization of our campuses as well as their cultural, social and economic impacts in communities across the region cannot be overstated,” said M. Surette. Adding that, “international students are critically important to regional population growth.” Research conducted by the AAU among graduating international students in 2017 revealed that 65% would like to stay in the region following their graduation.

The AAU is thankful for the federal government’s decision (October 2) to ease travel restrictions on international students so they can begin returning to campus.

M. Surette noted that, “our universities are establishing plans to welcome international students back to campus safely and are fully-equipped to place them in the required 14-day quarantine upon their arrival.”

The most concerning enrolment decline occurred among **full-time first-year students**, down -10.5% year-over-year (-1,477). M. Surette explained that, “this will have a significant impact on enrolment and institutional sustainability over the next three-to-four years.”

There was, however, a significant increase in **part-time enrolment** of 19.6% (+2,438). “One could hypothesize that many first-year students opted to go part-time because of travel restrictions and uncertainty about their adaptability to virtual learning versus traditional in classroom learning”, said M. Surette.

He added that, “we continue to work closely with provincial health authorities to ensure our campus communities remain safe for everyone. At the same time, we are focused on cost control and investment in the quality and delivery of online, in-person and hybrid learning as we adapt to what remains an uncertain operating environment”.

M. Surette concluded that, “any enrolment decline is a concern, especially among first-year and international students, however, the results illustrate the strength and stability of the university sector in Atlantic Canada at a time when the pandemic has had a devastating effect on so many people and other sectors.”

The Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) represents the interests of universities across the region, ensuring public visibility for the important role they play in preparing future leaders of our communities, in path-breaking research and innovation, and in contributing to the economic, cultural and social prosperity of life in Atlantic Canada.

For further information, contact:

Peter Halpin, Executive Director
(902) 425-4238/(902) 497-4419
phalpin@atlanticuniversities.ca