



Summary Report

Experiential Learning and Outcomes
of New Brunswick University Graduates



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Project Title

Experiential learning and outcomes of New Brunswick university graduates

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How to Cite This Product

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Why is This Study Important?

University is a pivotal stage in students' lives. It's a time when many begin to deepen their academic interests, gain confidence in their abilities, and make decisions about the careers they hope to pursue. As students move closer to entering the workforce, **experiential learning (EL)** opportunities allow them to apply their learning in real-world settings, potentially shaping their goals and sense of direction.

In New Brunswick (NB), federal and provincial governments have made substantial investments to expand EL opportunities for post-secondary students. Initiatives such as Future NB aim to connect students with employers, help them build workplace-relevant skills, and expose them to career pathways within the province. These efforts reflect a shared belief that hands-on learning can support students' academic success while also helping them build the networks and experience needed to transition smoothly into the workforce. This connection between learning and labour market readiness is particularly important in NB, as the province's future economic growth depends in part on whether graduates choose to stay and contribute to the local labour market.

However, despite growing interest in EL, there is limited evidence on participation patterns and outcomes within the NB context. While research suggests that EL is linked with positive employment outcomes,¹⁻³ less is known about whether the EL opportunities available in NB's universities influence graduates' decisions to stay and work in the province.

This study helps fill that gap. Drawing on administrative data from NB's four public universities, it examines EL participation between 2015 and 2022. It compares participation across demographic and academic groups, and it examines whether participating in EL is associated with higher rates of retention one and three years after completing an undergraduate degree. The findings offer timely insights into how hands-on learning during university may support both student development and NB's broader workforce goals.



How Was This Study Completed?

To undertake this study, we used EL data provided by Mt. Allison University (MTA), St. Thomas University (STU), Université de Moncton (UMoncton), and the University of New Brunswick (UNB), along with student information data from the university registrars and demographic details from the Citizen Data. Using this unique, linked administrative data set, we examined EL participation trends and analyzed the retention outcomes of students who participated in EL at NB's four public universities between 2015 and 2022.

Students were grouped as EL participants or non-participants based on whether they engaged in university-supported EL activities during their undergraduate studies. Retention was assessed by examining whether graduates remained eligible for NB Medicare one and three years after completing their degrees. Outcomes were explored across key characteristics such as sex, field of study, institution, and residence category. Regression analysis was also used to explore factors associated with EL participation, EL intensity, and graduate retention while accounting for differences across student groups. More details are available in the [full report](#).



Limitations

While reading the results on the next pages, it's important to remember that there are certain limitations to this study. For instance, each university in NB collects and records EL differently, which means some EL activities may not be captured in our data set. As a result, the participation rates presented here likely underestimate actual EL engagement. Specifically, UMoncton's data primarily reflect activities recorded through its Experiential Learning Office, which did not systematically capture EL from all departments and may therefore undercount participation.

In addition, EL tracking only began in 2018, while many students in this study entered university earlier. Students who participated in EL only before 2018 may therefore appear as non-participants in our data.

Key Findings: Experiential Learning at NB Universities

Between 2015 and 2022, around **36%** of university students participated in at least one experiential learning (EL) program, course, or activity.

How do we define experiential learning?

- ➔ A framework that helps students integrate their academic studies with authentic experiences and intentional reflection.
- ➔ Experiential learning allows students to apply their learning in new contexts and begin to understand how it can have a tangible impact on themselves, future goals, and the communities around them.⁴



Breaking Down Experiential Learning Participation

Of the 4 universities, UNB had the **highest EL participation rate**, with **54%** of its students taking part in EL.

- ↳ UMoncton showed the lowest rate (8%), but this is likely due to incomplete data collection - and is *not* a reflection of actual participation.

EL participation rates were nearly identical across all three residence categories.

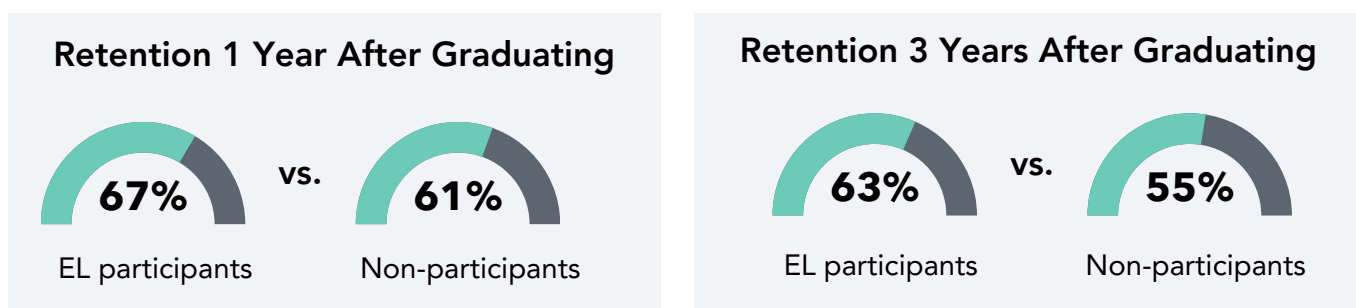
- ↳ **37%** of students from NB, **36%** of students from other provinces, and **36%** of international students all participated in EL.

Types of Experiential Learning

Similar to Future NB, we group EL into four categories: Applied Research, Work-Integrated Learning, Course-Based EL, and Co-Curricular Development. Course-Based EL seems to be the most popular, representing **58%** of EL participation.

Does Experiential Learning Impact Graduate Retention?

The short answer is **yes** - experiential learning is linked with higher graduate retention.



Note: Results reflect pooled graduate cohorts.



It should be noted that there has been variation in retention rates by graduation year, with a tendency for the gap to narrow over recent years.

Which University Graduates Had the Highest Retention?

Residents of NB had the highest 1-year retention: **92-93%** stayed in the province after graduating from university.



This was the case for both EL participants and non-participants, reflecting the strong impact of already having existing ties to NB.

About half of international students (**52%**) were still in NB 1 year after graduating – regardless of whether they were EL participants or non-participants.



In other words, participating in EL does not seem to have a strong impact on the retention of NB residents or international students.

Although out-of-province students had the lowest retention, experiential learning may have an impact on this group's decisions to stay in the province.



1-year retention (for the 2019-2022 cohorts) was **19%** for EL participants vs. **11%** for non-participants, and 3-year retention (for the 2019-2021 cohorts) was **21%** for participants vs. **10%** for non-participants.*

**As a note, the most recent cohort (2022) exhibits lower retention than earlier cohorts.*

Deep Dive: What Shapes Participation and Retention?



EL participation does not occur in a vacuum.

Institutional context, student origin, and program structure all shape who participates in EL and who stays in NB after graduation.

Recognizing these underlying patterns helps ensure that differences are interpreted accurately and fairly - like differences across universities and fields of study, as discussed below.

Student Backgrounds

Retention varies widely across universities, but this largely reflects who attends each university, not just the impact of EL itself.

UNB is a clear example: EL participants from UNB had a **70%** 1-year retention rate, compared to **49%** for non-participants.

At first glance, this suggests EL had a large impact on retention. However, the two groups differ substantially in their backgrounds:

65% of UNB's EL participants were from NB, vs. **46%** of non-participants.

Because NB residents already have much higher retention rates overall, differences in student composition play a major role in shaping results.

Program Requirements

EL participation also varies across fields of study, but these differences often reflect program structure rather than the impact of EL alone.

Education is a clear example: Although only **5%** of EL participants were enrolled in Education, they accounted for nearly **17%** of all EL experiences.

At first glance, this suggests Education students engage in EL far more than students in other fields. However, this pattern is driven by program requirements:

Education students participate in EL an average of **15 times**, largely due to practicum and placement expectations that have been built into the curriculum.

Who has the Highest Likelihood of Participating in EL - and Staying in NB?

When we hold all factors constant in a statistical analysis, we find that the students with significantly higher odds of participating in EL include:

- **UNB students**
- **International students**
- Students taking **Architecture, Engineering, and Related Technologies**



UNB students also have the highest probability of participating in high-intensity EL (that is, over 500 hours of EL).



Of all the fields of study, Humanities students have the highest odds of participating in short-duration EL (25 hours or less.)



Does Participating in EL Lower One's Likelihood of Leaving?

- ➔ Participating in EL is significantly associated with **lower odds** of leaving NB after graduation. EL participants had **36%** and **29%** lower odds than non-participants of leaving the province 1 and 3 years after graduation.

The Importance of Regression

While the results on earlier pages are based on observations of real students, the results on this page come from regression models, which focus on **likelihood**. Regression estimates how the chances of participating in EL or staying in NB change when one factor varies and others stay the same. This matters because, as we noted before, some patterns (like one group having higher retention) may reflect who is in that group, rather than the impact of EL alone. Regression helps us see if a pattern still holds when we compare students who are similar in key ways.

Conclusions

Overall, this study shows a clear link between experiential learning and stronger graduate retention in New Brunswick - particularly for students who come from other provinces. While the effect is not large, EL does appear to give non-local students valuable exposure to local workplaces, networks, and career opportunities that may increase their chances of staying in NB after graduation. For NB residents, retention is already very high, so the added impact of EL is naturally smaller.

At the same time, the results highlight that retention patterns are shaped by more than EL alone. Student background and program structure also influence who participates in EL and who remains in the province after graduating, and broader labour-market conditions likely play a key role as well. These factors help explain why results vary across institutions and fields of study.

In future iterations of this report, we would like to learn more about whether EL has a stronger impact for some groups beyond differences in student background, as well as how different types of EL affect different students. Future work could also explore how EL interacts with job opportunities, community ties, and other factors that influence graduates' decisions about where to build their lives and careers. Together, these insights can help strengthen EL programs and support NB's broader efforts to attract and retain talent.

References

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