

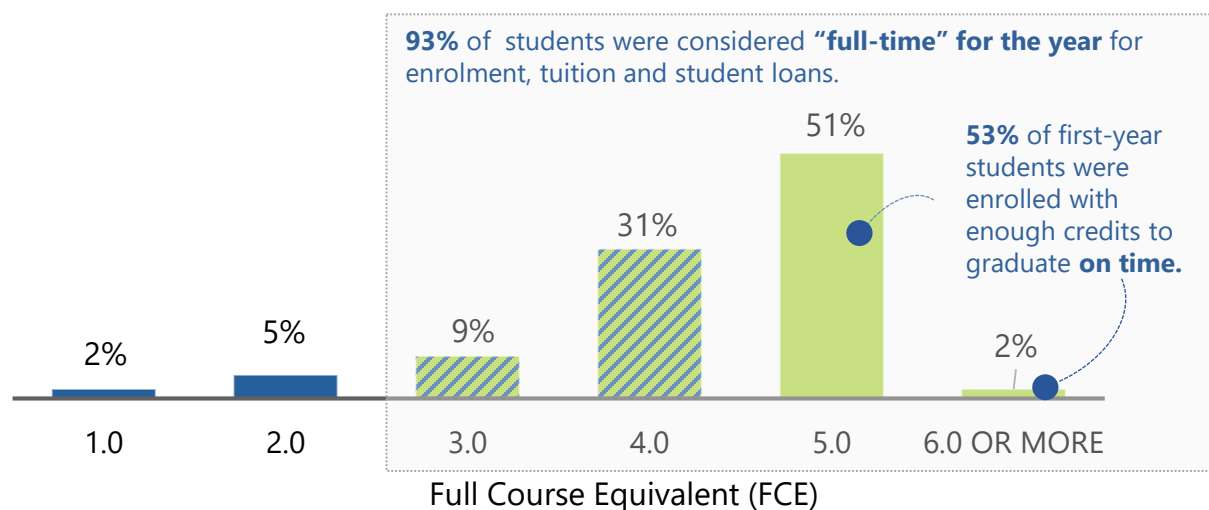
# How Full-Time are “Full-Time” Students?

The Impact of Student Course Load on Degree Progression and Completion

January 2023

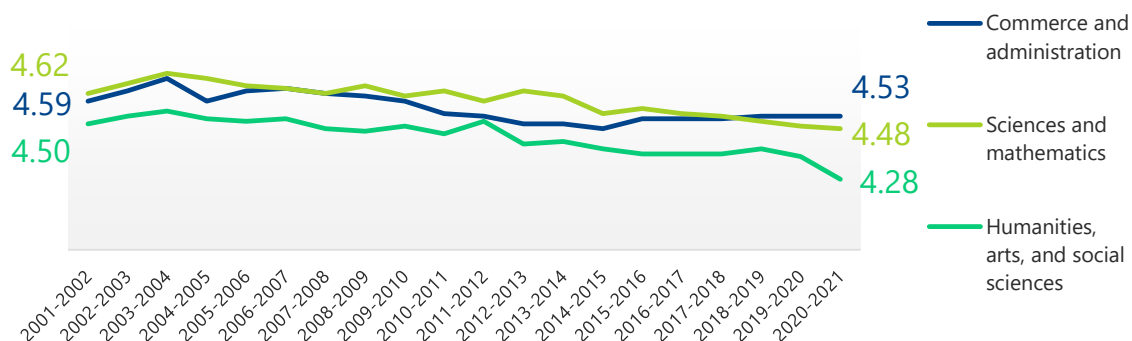
**In fall 2019, 98% of first-time first-year students at Maritime universities were enrolled full-time.** Full-time is defined as enrolled in a 60% course load, or more, in the fall term.

Percent of first-year students by annual course load in 2019-2020



A **Full course Equivalent (FCE)** is a full academic year course (September to April). A one-semester course is 0.5 FCE. Most bachelor programs require an annual course load of 5.0 FCE to graduate on time.

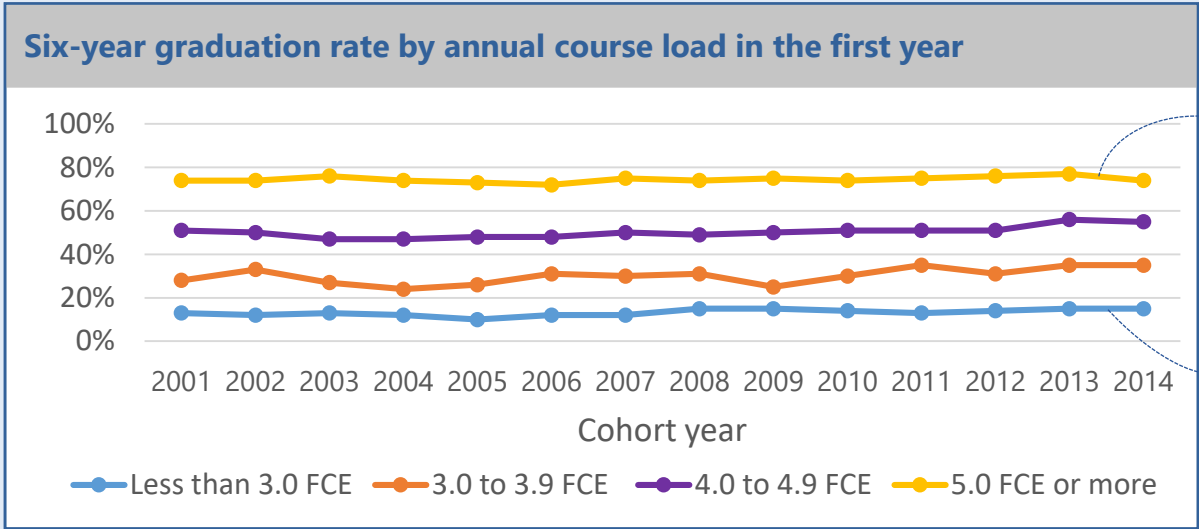
Average annual course load in first year by field of study



The average annual course load in first year has decreased over the years. Students enrolled in the Humanities, arts and social sciences have the lowest course load and show the largest drop over time.

This study focuses on bachelor's degree programs in fields of study that normally require an annual course load of 5.0 FCE to complete a degree "on time." A total of 146,211 first time students who enrolled in a bachelor's degree between 2001 and 2020 are included. All measures are presented at the Maritime university system level. Course load includes the sum of all courses taken at any Maritime university during the reporting year. More information on the methodology and detailed statistical tables are available from: [MPHEC. January 2023. Student Progression in the Maritime University System: Course Load, Term-to-term Persistence and Stop-outs.](#)

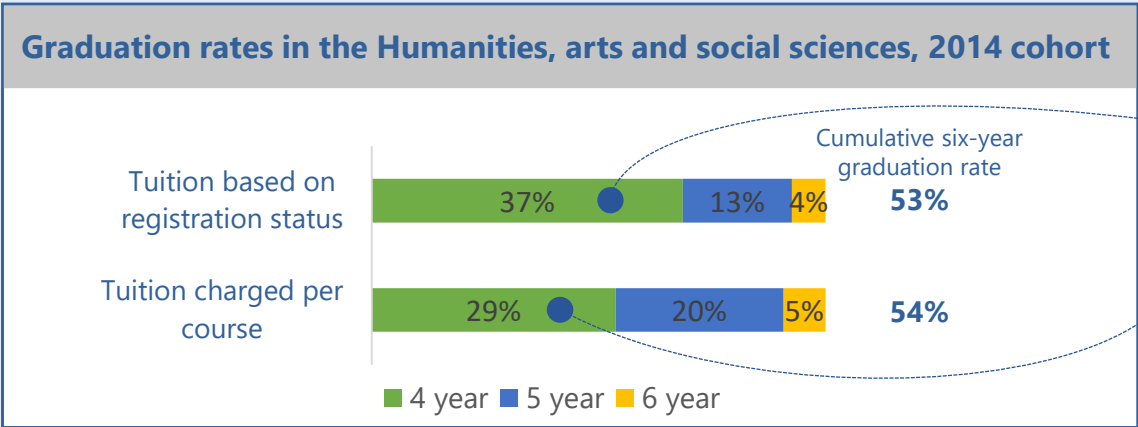
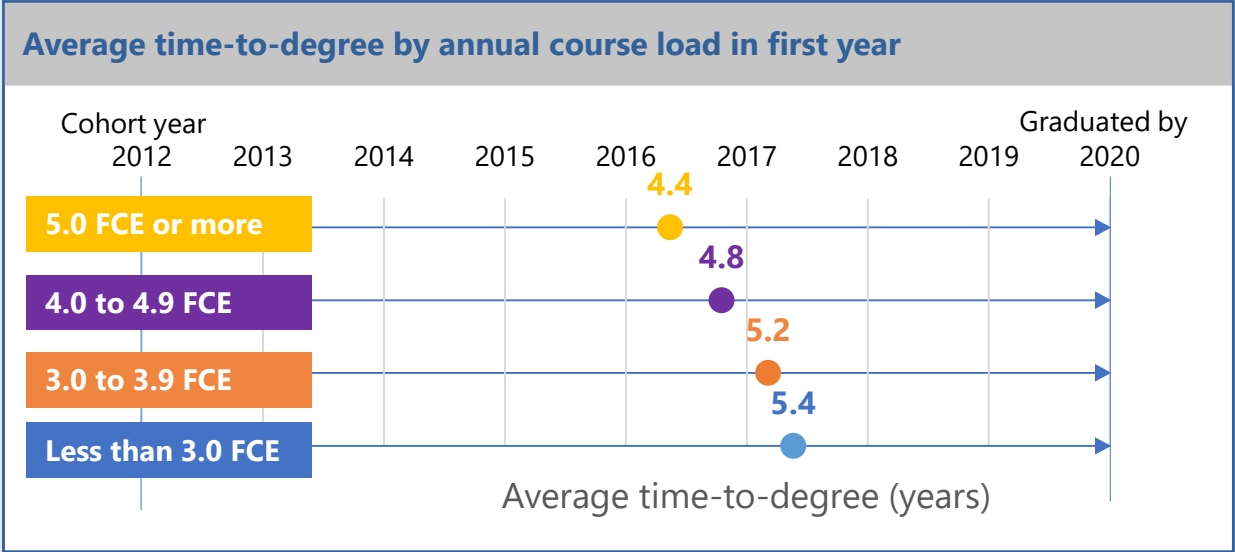
A lower course load in first year is linked to lower graduation rates and a longer time-to-degree.



The six-year graduation rate for students with 5.0 FCE or more in their first year is close to 80%.

Less than 20% of students with a course load below 3.0 FCE in their first-year graduate within six years.

Graduates with a course load below 3.0 FCE in their first year take, on average, one extra year to complete a degree than graduates with a course load of 5.0 FCE.



Universities that charge tuition based on a full-time registration status show a higher average first-year course load (4.5 FCE), and a higher four-year graduation rate.

Universities that charge tuition per course show a lower average first-year course load (4.3 FCE) and a lower four-year graduation rate.

Taking a lighter course load may be a strategy that allows some students to persist in their studies. Students may be taking fewer courses each year for financial or mental health reasons, but ultimately still complete a degree. In a future study, the Commission will be linking the responses of a 2022 survey of first-year students to their course load data and monitor their progression through their degree to understand the factors behind student pathways.