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## Top 8 Academic All-Canadians to be honoured by Governor General Julie Payette

November 8, 2017

TORONTO (U SPORTS) – U SPORTS proudly announced Wednesday the student-athletes selected as Top 8 Academic All-Canadians for the 2016-17 season.

### [All-Time Top 8 Academic All-Canadians](#)

The elite group will be honoured in Quebec City on Dec. 8, when **Her Excellency the Right Honourable Julie Payette**, the newly-appointed Governor General of Canada, presents the fifth annual Governor General’s Academic All-Canadian Commendation to the eight recipients during a ceremony at the **Citadelle of Québec**, the Governor General’s official residence in Quebec City.

The Governor General’s Academic All-Canadian Commendation was founded by previous Governor General, the Right Honourable **David Johnston**, who first honoured Canada’s Top 8 student-athletes in 2013.

In 2016-17, **3,638** U SPORTS student-athletes are being recognized as Academic All-Canadians, having maintained an average of 80 per cent or better over the academic year while competing for one - or more - of their university’s varsity teams.

Among these outstanding individuals, one female and one male student-athlete from each of the four U SPORTS conferences are selected annually to make up the Top 8.

“The list of Academic All-Canadians continues to grow each year,” said **Graham Brown**, President and CEO of U SPORTS. “The success of the Top 8 is a testament to the dedication of our student-athletes on the field of play, in the classroom and as leaders in their communities across the country.”

Profiles of each member of the 2016-17 Top 8 are available below.

### **CANADA WEST (CW)**

**Name:** Margaret (Meg) Casault

**Hometown:** Edmonton, Alta.





**School:** University of Alberta  
**Faculty:** Physical Education and Recreation  
**Program:** BSc. Kinesiology  
**Sports:** Women's volleyball  
**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Fifth Year

Having already established herself as one of the best players in University of Alberta Pandas volleyball program history, fifth-year outside hitter **Meg Casault** had a final season for the record books. Over the first four years over her varsity career, Casault proved she was one of the best outside hitters in Canada, earning three Canada West first team all-star spots, and three U SPORTS All-Canadian honours. However, Casault reached an entirely new level in 2016-17. The Edmonton, Alta., product torched the Alberta Pandas and Canada West record books, finishing her fifth season with 327 kills, 193 digs, and 378.5 points. That production earned Casault her fourth Canada West all-star and U SPORTS All-Canadian honour, as well as both the Canada West women's volleyball MVP, and U SPORTS MVP.

Because of her outstanding final season, Casault also set new Alberta Pandas, and Canada West records for career kills (1,321) and points (1513.0), while becoming the first ever Panda to accumulate 1,000 kills, 900 digs, and 100 aces.

Her play was a large reason the Pandas led Canada West with a 22-2 conference record, before earning the program's 11<sup>th</sup> Canada West championship in March. The Pandas would carry that success into the U SPORTS Championship, earning a national silver medal.

While her athletic achievements are noteworthy, what really set Casault apart was her work ethic not only on the court, but also in the classroom and in the community. She earned four U SPORTS Academic All-Canadian awards during her time at the University of Alberta, and was awarded the 2016-17 Kathlene Yetman Award, presented to the University of Alberta's top female Academic All-Canadian. She earned a 3.8 GPA in a very demanding BSc. kinesiology program at the U of A, graduating with a Bachelor of Science, Kinesiology degree with distinction.

Meg was also a tremendous ambassador for University of Alberta student-athletes, spending countless hours in her community as an elementary school student-mentor at Richard Secord School. She was also active on campus, spending time as stimulation tester/gym monitor at the Steadward Centre for Personal and Physical Achievement.

"Meg is an extremely deserving recipient of the Top 8 Academic All-Canadian Award. Since her first year with the team she has shown a remarkable improvement in every aspect of the game due to her humility and commitment to continuous improvement, both on the court and in the classroom," said Pandas head coach **Laurie Eisler**. "She is not only a leader on the court, but served as one of our team captains, and is an inspiration to all of us who have had the pleasure and honour to work with her."





**Name:** Geoff Gray  
**Hometown:** Winnipeg, Man.  
**School:** University of Manitoba  
**Faculty:** Engineering  
**Program:** Engineering  
**Sports:** Football  
**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Fourth year

Geoff Gray had an award-winning and historic 2016 season with the University of Manitoba Bisons football team.

Gray, 23, completed his fourth season at Manitoba and was selected 2016 Canada West Outstanding Down Lineman of the Year plus conference all-star in 2016 at the guard position. For a second consecutive season the conference's outstanding down lineman hails from Manitoba. Gray takes over the title from former Bison turned New Orleans Saints defensive tackle David Onyemata, who won the award on the defensive side of the ball last year before being drafted in the fourth round of the 2015 NFL Draft. At the guard position on the offensive line, the 6-foot-6, 310-pound. player was instrumental in opening holes for the running game and providing protection for the quarterbacks during the 2016 campaign. The Winnipeg native showed his durability as he started in all eight conference regular season games in 2016. Gray finished ranked No.1 in the CFL's Scouting Bureau – final Top 20 prospect in May 2016, ahead of the 2017 CFL Draft.

Gray also was named a 2016 U SPORTS football First Team All-Canadian at the guard position and was showcased when selected and played in the prestigious East-West Shrine Game in January 2017 and received praise before and after the Shrine Game from numerous NFL scouts and media. Later in the season, he held a successful pro day at University of Manitoba in front of eight NFL teams and scouts.

Gray has also excelled off the field as he has juggled academics and sports throughout his university life and registered a 4.42 GPA in fourth year of engineering while being a U SPORTS Academic All-Canadian for a fourth consecutive year with Manitoba.

The Winnipeg Blue Bombers selected Gray in the first round (eighth overall). He also signed as a priority free agent with the NFL's Green Bay Packers on April 30, 2017. The versatile offensive lineman then joined and made the practice roster of the New York Jets as an NFL rookie for the 2017 season.

His community service has been involved with local football camps over the years, while also participating in Siloam Mission visit, which assists people in need in the inner-city.





"It's amazing when you look at all the young players who compete as student-athletes. In coaching, you see the tremendous grind on a daily basis, week in and week out, through the entire year," stated Brian Dobie, head coach of the Bisons. "It's especially impressive when a young person in Geoff Gray who continually pushes his limits and excels in his chosen field of engineering as well as his sport, football. He represents the best of the best and continues to push the boundaries upwards in his initial season in the National Football League."

## ONTARIO UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS (OUA)

**Name:** Katherine Bearne

**Hometown:** Halifax, N.S.

**School:** University of Ottawa

**Faculty:** Science

**Program:** Physics and Mathematics, Co-op

**Sports:** Soccer

**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Second year

A three-time OUA All-Star at midfield, Katherine Bearne was also the University of Ottawa's co-honouree as top Academic All-Canadian in 2016-17 with a perfect 10.0 GPA in the Faculty of Science's Physics and Mathematics program. Bearne led the Gee-Gees in scoring in 2017 with eight goals in the 2017 regular season, setting a career high. Bearne started 13 games at midfield for Ottawa this season and also contributed two assists along with superb defensive play. As a rookie, Bearne was a member of the Gee-Gees' 2014 OUA championship team.

After completing her International Baccalaureate diploma at Citadel High School in Halifax, N.S., Bearne chose to attend the University of Ottawa because of its unique combination degree of physics and mathematics. Having begun playing soccer at the age of six, Bearne feels extremely comfortable on the pitch and values highly the role of a teammate. Since her rookie season at uOttawa she has consistently made herself available to teammates for tutoring and academic assistance.

"Katherine likes to achieve mastery in every course that she takes - it is not about the marks it is about the knowledge that comes with completely understanding material," says Gee-Gees head coach Steve Johnson. "She wants to know more and tries to expand her knowledge and challenge herself because she loves to learn."

Katherine has completed two co-op placements in academic lab settings, with her most recent placement at a photonics lab which worked on solar cell devices, researching organic solar cells.

"All of the professors that I've worked with have been really great. They are just so passionate about what they do that it makes you want to find something that makes you as excited as them," says Bearne. "My supervisor at my last job was very research-based and he was really great





about teaching me about academia and how everyone functions, how everyone is connected as a scientific community around the world.

“It was really interesting because there was a lot of chemistry involved so we collaborated with chemists. They would make the molecules and then we would make them into solar cells, explains Bearne. “I enjoyed the hands-on work involved in that.

“Soccer has always been a peaceful thing for me,” adds Bearne, who represented Nova Scotia on the provincial soccer team. “When you are on the field, in that moment, that’s the only thing that matters.”

**Name:** Osvald Nitski

**Hometown:** Tallin, Estonia

**School:** University of Toronto

**Faculty:** Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering

**Program:** Mechanical Engineering

**Sport:** Swimming

**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Second year

In only his second season at the University of Toronto, Osvald Nitski has proven his dominance not only in the pool, but in the classroom as well. After earning both U SPORTS and University of Toronto male Rookie of the Year honours in 2015-16, Nitski reached the national podium for the second consecutive year, earning the individual bronze medal in the 200-metre butterfly last February. The native of Tallinn, Estonia helped the Blues to a silver-medal team finish on the national stage.

At the 2017 conference championships, Nitski reached the podium four times. The two-time OUA first team all-star claimed two individual gold medals, winning the 400 and 1500m freestyle events, while claiming the silver medal in the 200m butterfly and bronze medal in the 400m individual medley. He was a key contributor as the Varsity Blues won their 14th straight OUA banner.

Academically, Osvald has been recognized on the Dean’s Honour list in each academic term at the University of Toronto’s prestigious mechanical engineering program. A two-time U SPORTS Academic All-Canadian, Nitski earned the J. Colin Finlayson scholarship, awarded based on academic merit to students who demonstrate leadership in the community. He also received the Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering scholarship and won the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) undergraduate student research award.

Despite his busy schedule, Nitski also finds time to help out in the community. In 2016-17, he volunteered his time with the Blues Buddy Up program, a leadership and character building





initiative, created and delivered by University of Toronto Varsity Blues athletes, that is designed to target personal and interpersonal skill development in elementary aged students.

“Osvald was a highly recruited swimmer out of high school and he chose U of T because he is a superb student, proven by his rank as one of the top students in his engineering class,” said long-time Varsity Blues head coach Byron MacDonald. “The fact that he can combine such lofty academic success with his swim career has netted him several honours, including winning the national title in two events. He regularly takes on the toughest events in the meet program and excels. He understands the benefits of hard work and has moved his career forward due to his relentless pursuit to get better.”

## RÉSEAU DU SPORT ÉTUDIANT DU QUÉBEC (RSEQ)

**Name:** Fabiola Forteza

**Hometown:** Montreal, QC

**School:** Université Laval

**Faculty:** Medicine

**Program:** Bachelor of Kinesiology

**Sport:** Rugby

**Year of Eligibility in 2016-2017:** Third year

Born in Montreal, **Fabiola Forteza** moved to Quebec City with her family at the age of nine. She tried rugby for the first time in Grade 9 while studying at Collège Jésus-Marie. She fell in love with the sport, which her Argentinian father, a big rugby fan, introduced her to.

Her contribution since she joined the Rouge et Or in 2014 is undeniable. In 2016, she was elected RSEQ’s athlete of the year and was a member of the U SPORTS All-Canadian team. Her natural talent also caught the attention of Rugby Canada’s national team, first with the development training program (*Las Vegas Sevens Invitational, Canada’s Maple Leafs to England*) and then with the senior squad (*Super Series, November Series*).

On an academic level, Forteza completed her Bachelor of Kinesiology degree in the fall, maintaining an impressive average of 4.09 out of 4.33 last year. She was also enrolled in the food and nutrition program, which she finds complements her field of learning, and hopes to graduate from it with a Master’s degree. Along with being a consecutive scholarship holder for her academic achievements and being on the Rouge et Or program, she was also recognized by the Fondation de l’athlète d’excellence du Québec and the Government of Canada’s Athlete Assistance Program.

In her community, the 22-year-old student-athlete was a coach for the Club de rugby de Québec and manager of the provincial team last year. She mentored weekly in physical activity at the Académie St-Louis as part of the *Filleactive* program, which motivates and encourages young





high school girls to give sports a second chance. In addition, Fabiola volunteers at the Olympiques spéciaux Québec where she finds different ways to train athletes with mental or physical disabilities, a place where she would like to work in the future.

“I’m very happy for Fabiola. She fully deserves this honour. She’s one of the most hardworking girls I know,” said Laval coach Kévin Rouet. “She’s an example for her teammates in terms of her work ethic which is felt on the field as a rugby player. She’s not satisfied with just being a good player. She always aims to excel in everything she does – including her studies.”

**Name:** Louis-Mathieu Normandin

**Hometown:** Montreal, Que.

**School:** Université de Montréal

**Program:** Administration

**Sport:** Football

**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Second year

Born on the Island of Montreal in Quebec, receiver Louis-Mathieu Normandin made himself known from his first season with the Carabins in 2015. The Cégep du Vieux-Montréal Spartiates graduate accumulated an impressive total of 717 yards in eight games, thanks to a team-high 40 catches with the Carabins that year. With a little less than 2000 yards in his career, Normandin is now the third best Carabins receiver and has at least one more season to play in Université de Montréal’s colours.

Normandin is not only the Carabins’ offensive star either. Studying administration, the student-athlete from Hautes Études Commercial de Montréal received mention of excellence during each of his six semesters since his enrollment in university, even making an appearance during the Université de Montréal’s student-athlete academic luncheon in 2017. Since Day 1, Normandin had never obtained a lower grade than the average of his cohort, reaching a 3.98 grade average each semester.

Since 2015, the Carabins receiver has been taking young football players in the region under his wing, helping them become better players and better people by organising customized practices. Along with his teammates, he devotes himself to motivational conferences in primary schools where he passes on various values that he holds dear. Normandin was recently the guest of honour at the gala of his former high school, Collège Notre-Dame du Sacré-Cœur, where he gave a speech on how to become the best person possible at the academic, social and athletic level. During his time at Cégep du Vieux-Montréal, he was part of the major fundraising campaign “Ouvrir les horizons” from 2013 to 2017. This campaign, which is still ongoing, aims to collect \$2 million to create bursary funds, update sophisticated equipment and provide a program to help students with disabilities.





“On or off the field, Louis-Mathieu always prepares the same way, “mentioned his University of Montreal head coach Danny Maciocia. “He’s a stunning athlete but also an exceptional student. He’s very careful and very prepared in all aspects of his life. Louis-Mathieu knows that his work will lead him far in life, and as a coach, I can’t be happier about his devotion. We’re very proud of him.”

“He’s a young man who is an exceptional role model to watch grow,” added Manon Simard, director of the Carabins program of excellence. “He’s fully invested in everything he undertakes. He does it with his values, respect, and commitment – he does it with heart. He is a young man that inspires with his actions, his behaviours, and his ideas.”

## **ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY SPORT (AUS)**

**Name:** Anna Dunn-Suen

**Hometown:** Halifax, N.S.

**School:** Dalhousie University

**Faculty:** Science

**Program:** Microbiology & Immunology

**Sports:** Volleyball

**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Fourth year

Anna Dunn-Suen had a tremendous impact at Dalhousie University, both on off the court. A four-year member of the women’s volleyball team, she helped lead the Tigers to four consecutive AUS championship titles earning numerous individual awards along the way. A two-time AUS all-star, Dunn-Suen was named to the all-rookie team at the end of the 2013-14 season and earned AUS championship MVP and all-star nods in her last three conference championship tournaments.

A native of Halifax, N.S., Dunn-Suen graduated in the Spring of 2017 with Honours, majoring in microbiology and immunology. She also earned a minor in french and a certificate in genetics. A recipient of the french department’s Prix de Merit, she was a Dean’s List student and a U SPORTS Academic All-Canadian in all four of her years at Dalhousie. Dunn-Suen has also been involved in many research programs including the Cheng Lab’s research on market pro-biotic bacterial beverages and supplements.

As if striking a successful balance between being a student and an athlete wasn’t enough, Dunn-Suen has also found the time to give back. She’s volunteered on the Faculty of Medicine’s microbiology infectious disease clinical rounds and has coached at both the provincial and club levels. She has volunteered in Cambodia, helping to build a school library and contributing to the largest man-made coral reef to promote oceanic biodiversity and community sustainability. She’s also been active on campus with the Special Tigers program and is a regular contributor to the CIBC Run for the Cure and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s Light the Night Walk.





“Anna Dunn-Suen is one of the most committed and hardest working student-athletes that I have ever had the privilege to coach,” says Dalhousie volleyball coach Rick Scott. “She is a highly motivated and extremely disciplined individual who takes great pride in everything she does. Anna played a vital part in our four consecutive AUS women’s volleyball championship titles and in our success at the national level.”

**Name:** Eric Locke  
**Hometown:** Toronto, Ont.  
**School:** St. Francis Xavier University  
**Faculty:** Science  
**Program:** Human Kinetics  
**Sport:** Hockey  
**Eligibility in 2016-17:** Third year

Over his three years at StFX, Eric Locke has reached the highest level of achievement in the four key pillars of student-athlete success: athletics, academics, citizenship and leadership. As a captain with the X-Men hockey team, he has excelled both on and off the ice.

Locke, a Toronto native, led the X-Men to back-to-back AUS conference championship banners, the first men’s hockey titles for StFX since 2004. The 2016 StFX male athlete of the year, he also appeared in three consecutive U SPORTS national championships and was a silver medalist with the team in 2016. Locke was honored as the 2016 Atlantic University Sport most valuable player, in addition to receiving AUS first team all-star status and being named a 2016 U SPORTS First Team All-Canadian. He was the X-Men top scorer and most valuable player in each of the past two seasons and received AUS second team all-star status in 2017.

In terms of academic success, Locke is a three-time U SPORTS Academic All-Canadian and Dean’s List student who ranked tops in his class in the Bachelor of Science, human kinetics program. He received the university’s Larkin Trophy awarded to the top senior male student for excellence in academics and extra-curriculars and was the recipient of the 2016-17 StFX Athletic Director’s Award for Academic Achievement with the highest grades of any male student-athlete on campus. Locke was also honored by the AUS as the 2017 James Bayer award-winner, recognizing excellence in academics, athletics, leadership, sportsmanship and citizenship.

Building upon excellence in citizenship and leadership, Locke received the 2016-17 StFX Athletics Male Community X-Cellence award and the 2017 AUS men’s hockey Godfrey Award, recognizing community service. The outstanding work Eric has done in the community includes involvement with the Antigonish, N.S., minor hockey mentorship program, StFX Fit 4 Tots program, volunteering with the Antigonish Multisport Program and the Paq’Tnkek First Nation Learn to Play initiative. He was an X-Men representative on the StFX Student-Athlete Advisory Council for the past two years and was a member of the StFX Pre-Med Society. A member of the StFX Leadership Academy for three years, Eric was honoured as a ‘Leader of Distinction’, the highest honour bestowed by the





Leadership Academy. Since graduating from StFX last May, Eric was accepted into medical school at the University of Ottawa and is now a member of the Gee-Gee's hockey program.

“Eric Locke is an outstanding example of what a student-athlete should stand for. He is an elite hockey player, a dynamic player on the ice and was a tremendous leader as our team captain,” said X-Men head coach Brad Peddle. “Off the ice, he is a three-time Academic All-Canadian, finishing at the top of his class last year with a 94 average. His ability to balance both athletics and academics is among the best I have seen, and he continues to drive himself to be better in every way.”

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For further information, please contact:

**Ken Saint-Eloy**

Senior Manager,  
Communications  
U SPORTS  
Cell: 647-871-7595  
ksainteloy@usports.ca

**Alan Hudes**

Coordinator, Communications  
U SPORTS  
Off: 905-508-3000 ext. 242  
Cell: 647-991-5343  
ahudes@usports.ca



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**WE ARE UNIVERSITY SPORT / NOUS SOMMES LE SPORT UNIVERSITAIRE**

45 rue Vogell Road, 701, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada L4B 3P6  
t (905) 508 3000 f (905) 508 4221

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