

Tracer and Employability of Tourism Major Graduates of Mindanao State University, Main Campus

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ABSTRACT

Employability is one of the most essential performance indicators for higher education institutions, and tracking graduates gives valuable information for student growth and curriculum improvement. There has been no study about the tracer and employability of the Tourism major graduates from the College of Hotel and Restaurant Management.

This study embarked on the demographic profile of the graduates, their current employment, and their assessment of the skills and abilities learned from the program. This study was participated with 108 respondents who have graduated with a degree of BS Tourism and BS Ecotourism at CHARM-MSU. Respondents were chosen purposively, and distribution of questionnaire was through online platform. Questionnaire was adapted from Tertiary Education Commission of New Zealand of 2011 in collaboration with the University of Mauritius (UoM) and the University of Technology, Mauritius (UTM). Result showed that the graduates are employed in private companies and government offices. They greatly recognized the skills and abilities they have acquired from the program. The findings tell us that the program is applicable to their present job; it enabled them to become a reliable employee. However, respondents also acknowledged that there must be improvement of their exposures and advance tourism laboratories must be established.

Keywords: Graduate Tracer, Employability, BS Tourism, BS Ecotourism, Mindanao State University

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, the tourism industry is one of the most powerful engines that contributes to and sustains economic growth (1). Tourism employed 3.8 million Filipinos in 2011, according to the National Statistical Coordination Board. It continues to expand in 2016, employing 7.4 million people, a growth of 18.8%, and contributing 8 to 9% of the country's gross domestic product. (2) (3).

The journey of offering Bachelor of Science in Tourism began in June 1973, when the Center for Hotel and Restaurant Management was established in Mindanao State University-Marawi. This program aims to respond to the Government's decision to give primary attention to the development of tourism in Lake Lanao area as a major component for an all-out development program in Mindanao. The Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management was offered in the first semester of Academic Year 1973-1974 with four pioneering students. The Center was tasked to devise and conduct trainings to develop skilled manpower for the hospitality industry in the MinSuPala (Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan) Region, implement extension programs for workers already in service, and take charge of the reception and billeting of University's guests and other special catering needs of the University. Considering its academic functions in the University, the Center was granted the College status on October 29, 1979 (BOR Resolution No. 2044, s. 1979) (4).

The University granted the College's long-standing request to offer a Bachelor of Science in Tourism (Eco-Tourism) through BOR Resolution No. 555, series of 2004, which was implemented in the first semester of

Academic Year 2005-2006 under Special Order No. 152-OP series of 2005, signed by former President Dr. Camar Umpa. The BS Tourism program is exclusively offered at the Marawi campus among the Mindanao State University System's eleven campuses. (4)

Since the offering of the BS Tourism program, Graduate Tracer Studies (GTS) have not been conducted. It is indeed high time to perform such, as it is reflected as one of the requirements of higher education accrediting bodies such as the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP). Verona (2011), as cited by Rojas, T. T., & Rojas, R. C (5) described tracer research as a strategy for tracking graduates of an academic institution to provide feedback to both the graduates and their alma mater. Balingbing (2014) as cited by Cervantes, M. L. D.(6) stated the importance of tracer study as an assessment and enhancement of existing educational programs offered by every academic institution. Moreover, Schomburg (2003, p.6), as cited by Gines, A. C. (7), shares that graduate survey results are important for “analysis of relationship between higher education and work.” This establishes the connection of quality of graduates shaped by their standards of curriculum and instruction imposed by Commission on Higher Education (CHED) on them. Furthermore, Mercado (2004), as cited by Ramirez, T. L., Cruz, L. T., & Alcantara, N. V. (8) noted that the Commission on Higher Education's initiative to spearhead the conduct of GTS among selected Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in order to collect data on whether HEIs are offering programs that generate graduates who satisfy the needs of industry and society. Rojas, T. T., & Rojas, R. C (5) emphasized that a student's ability to learn for the rest of his or her life, and hence his or her employability, is boosted by their university experience. In fact, determining a graduate's employability is a critical component of student development programs and curriculum improvement.

Objectives of the Study

This study was conducted to determine the employability of BS Tourism graduates of Mindanao State University-Marawi Campus from 2008 to 2020. Specifically, this study aimed to describe the profile of the graduates; their employment status; the level of relevance of competency skills they acquired; the strengths and weaknesses of the program; and the suggestions from graduates for improvement of the program.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used the descriptive research design to know the characteristics of the variables. This was participated by 108 graduates of BS Tourism from 2008 to 2020. The survey instrument was patterned from collaborative study of the Tertiary Education in New Zealand and the University of Mauritius and the University of Technology Mauritius (9). There were modifications done by the researchers to suit the present study being undertaken. The first part of the questionnaire is the profile in terms of name (optional), gender, civil status, and highest educational attainment. Second is the employment information composed of current employment status, type of organization employed, area of employment, length of job search, and factors in finding the job. Third is relevance of competency skills acquired and evaluation on the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The questionnaire was made using Google Form and was distributed to the graduates' personal Messenger account. Since it was conducted during the pandemic, using Google Form is the most practical, cost effective, and safe. The said form was uploaded publicly by one of the researcher's Facebook account and Facebook page “Taga-MSU Main Campus jud ka kung?” The Google Form started accepting responses from March 30, 2021, and was closed on May 10, 2021.

Frequency percentage and weighted mean were employed to analyze the data. To measure the level of relevance of competency skills and abilities acquired, the description guide below was used:

1.00-1.80- Very Highly Relevant

1.81-2.61- Highly Relevant

2.62-3.42- Moderately Relevant

3.43-4.23- Fairly Relevant

4.24- 5.00- Not Relevant

To determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program, the following legend was used:

1.00-1.66- Strength

1.67-2.33- Weakness

2.34-3.00- Does not apply

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents in terms of profile. There were 80 or 74.07% female and only 28 or 25.93% were male. The data can be associated with study of Virola (2008), as cited by Cervantes, M. L. D. (6) which reveals that women have an increasing desire of prioritizing education over marriage. This further shows that female employees dominate the tourism industry as indicated in the study of Buama, C. A. C., (10) Further, 51 or 47.22% of the respondents were in the age bracket of 27-31 years old, while 47 or 43.52% were 22-26 years old. Majority or 73 of the respondents were single, followed by married, hat is 33 or 30.56%.

Moreover, 17 or 15.74% obtained their degree in 2015, followed by 12 or 11.11% who finished their studies in 2013. In terms of highest educational attainment, 96 or 88.89 % finished the bachelor's degree, while 11 or 10.18% held a master's degree, and 2 or 0.93% finished their doctorate.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	28	25.93
Female	80	74.07
Total	108	100
Age		
22-26	47	43.52
27-31	51	47.22
32-36	9	8.33
37-41	1	0.93
		100
Civil Status		
Single	73	67.59
Married	33	30.55
Separated	1	0.93
Widow/Widower	1	0.93
		100
Year Graduated		
2008	4	3.703
2009	3	2.78

2010	7	6.481
2011	5	4.63
2012	2	1.851
2013	12	11.111
2014	9	8.333
2015	17	15.740
2016	11	10.19
2017	9	8.333
2018	11	10.19
2019	8	7.41
2020	10	9.26
	108	100
Highest Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's Degree	96	88.89
Master's Degree	11	10.18
Doctorate	1	0.93
		100

The working status of respondents indicates that 93 or 86.11% are working while 15 are unemployed. As to the reasons behind unemployment, 3 or 20% revealed that it is due to family concerns, while 3 or 20% disclosed that they did not look for a job yet. Lastly, 13.33% were laid off due to the pandemic. This study was conducted when the pandemic hit the world causing the unemployment of some tourism employees, and jobs are barely available for them. Majority of the employed graduates are working in the private sector. The data of this study is aligned with that of Cervantes, M. L. D. (6) that graduates of the College of Business Entrepreneurship and Accountancy (CBEA) are mostly employed in the private organizations. As to their nature of work, 27.96% work in the business industry related to tourism and hospitality while 23.66% joined as part of the government service. As to employment status, majority of the respondents are working full-time while 11.11% work as contractual employee. This study has a similar finding with study of Cervantes, M. L. D. (6).

In terms of length of job search after their graduation, 58 or 53.70% abstained, while 32 or 29.63% of the respondents landed in their first job after months. It is noted in the study of Dimalibot, G.A., et al. (11) that 44% of their respondents were employed within a year. However, the study of Cervantes, M. L. D. (6) presented that majority of the respondents were employed in one to six months. The result may be different from the findings of other research because of the choices or because the respondents may have forgotten the details of their employment.

In terms of how the employed respondents search for their current job, 39 or 41.93% are through referral, while 24 or 25.80% are through vacancy notices. The same findings can be found in the study of Gualberto and Ylagan (2008), as cited by Dimalibot, G.A., et al. (11), that graduates got their jobs from referral. However, Rojas, T. T., & Rojas, R. C (5) discovered that most of the respondents acquired their jobs through walk-in application. It was further stated that graduates have struggled to find full-time jobs after leaving the university. Thus, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) recommended to colleges and universities to put up placement offices that will provide graduates with the tools and skills they need to launch successful job searches that lead to career fulfillment. (5)

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Employment Information

Working Status	Frequency	Percentage
Working	93	86.11
Not working	15	13.89
Total	108	100%
Reasons for not Working		
1. Did not look for a job	3	20
2. Family concerns	3	20
3. Health related issues	2	13.333
4. No job opportunities	2	13.333
5. Lack of work experience	0	0.00
6. Further studies	1	6.67
7. Others		
a. Laid off due to COVID-19 pandemic	2	13.333
b. Religious commitment	1	6.67
c. Waiting for sea service schedule	1	6.67
Total	15	100
Type of Organization		
1. Government	38	35.19
2. Private	55	50.92
3. Unemployed	15	13.89
Total	108	100.00
Nature of Work		
Education	18	19.35
Business Industry (tourism and hospitality)	26	27.96
Government Service	22	23.66
BPO	14	15.05
Sales, Marketing, Finance	7	7.53
Online, Self-employed	6	6.45
Employment Status		
1. Working full-time	76	70.37
2. Working part-time but seeking full-time	2	1.85
3. Working part-time but not seeking full-time work	1	0.93
4. Working in contractual basis	12	11.11
5. Not working and available for a job	6	5.56
6. Not working and unavailable for work	2	1.85
7. Studying full-time	2	1.85
8. Did not answer (N/A)	7	6.48
Total	108	
Length in finding the first job	Frequency	Percentage
1. Days	6	5.56
2. Weeks	2	1.85
3. Months	32	29.63
4. Years	10	9.26

5. Preferred not to say	58	53.70
Total	108	100
Factors/Job Search		
1. International promotion (Direct abroad)	5	5.38
2. Newspaper advertisement	0	0.00
3. Vacancy notice (Direct information from local establishment)	24	25.80
4. Internet networking (online)	14	15.05
5. Employment service (local agency)	5	5.38
6. Job fair	3	3.23
Others		
a. Referral	39	41.93
b. Prefer not to say	3	3.23
Total	93	100
*15 of the respondents is currently not working		

As depicted in table 3, many of the respondents see the program of study as Very Relevant to their jobs (46.30%). This implies that they have learned from the program and have applied their learning in their jobs. However, 9 or 8.3% found it Not Relevant at all (8.3%), perhaps because they have landed on a job that does not match their degree. As Malonzo, J. and Jonson A.P. (12) cited, the United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organizations (2012) found that one of the reasons that contributes to unemployment among graduates in Asia is the mismatch of skills and interest. The growing job mismatch in the country was addressed by CHED through collaborating with universities in the Philippines in conducting Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) to determine the employability of graduates based on their respective disciplines Meñez, N.L (13).

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents in terms of the Relevance of the Program to their Job

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
1. Not Relevant	9	8.33
2. Fairly Relevant	18	16.67
3. Highly Relevant	31	28.70
4. Very Relevant	50	46.30
Total	108	100

Table 4: Relevance of Skills and Abilities to their Jobs

Variables	Very High		High		Medium		Low		Very Low		WM	Remarks
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Organizational Skills	48	44.0	38	34.9	22	20.2	0	0.0	0	0	1.76	Very High
Problem Solving Skills	43	39.4	43	39.4	22	20.2	0	0	0	0	1.81	High
Leadership Skills	47	43.1	35	32.1	24	22	2	1.8	0	0	1.82	High
Ability to work independently	68	62.4	35	32.1	5	4.6	0	0	0	0	1.42	Very High
Creativity/creative thinking	57	52.3	38	34.9	12	11.0	1	.9	0	0	1.60	Very High
Negotiating Skills	48	44.0	42	38.5	15	13.8	3	2.8	0	0.0	1.75	Very High
Teamwork/Team Orientation	61	56.0	40	36.7	7	6.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	1.50	Very High
Time Management	43	39.4	50	45.9	14	12.8	1	.9	0	0	1.75	Very High
Writing Skills	34	31.2	50	45.9	22	20.2	2	1.8	0	0	1.93	High

Communication Skills/Interpersonal Skills	46	42.2	45	41.3	17	15.6	0	0	0	0	1.59	Very High
Computer Skills	56	51.4	40	36.7	12	11.0			0	0	1.73	Very High
Job Specific Skill	40	36.7	49	45.0	17	15.6	2	1.8	0	0	1.82	High
Technical Knowledge	40	36.7	47	43.1	17	15.6	4	3.7	0	0	1.86	High
Decision-making	45	41.3	48	44.0	13	11.9	2	1.8	0	0	1.74	Very High
Entrepreneurship Skills	36	33.0	48	44.0	19	17.4	5	4.6	0	0	1.94	High
Ability to work under pressure	59	54.1	36	33.0	12	11.0	1	.9	0	0	1.58	Very High
Average Weighted Mean											1.73	Very High

1.00– 1.80 = Very highly Relevant;1.81 – 2.61 = Highly Relevant ; 2.62 – 3.42 = Moderately Relevant;3.43 – 4.23 = Fairly Relevant; 4.34 – 5.0 = Not Relevant

Table 5: Respondents' Evaluation on the Strength and Weakness of the Program

Factors	Strength		Weakness		Does not apply		WM	Remarks
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Student workload	85	78.0	15	13.8	8	7.3	1.29	Strength
Teaching quality	93	85.3	12	11.0	3	2.8	1.17	Strength
Inter-disciplinary learning	89	81.7	14	12.8	5	4.6	1.22	Strength
Facilities	52	47.7	54	49.5	2	1.8	1.54	Strength
Research capacity	58	53.2	48	44.0	2	1.8	1.48	Strength
Labor market relevance/adaptability	75	68.8	29	26.6	4	3.7	1.34	Strength
Industry linkages	66	60.6	36	33.0	6	5.5	1.44	Strength
Cost	82	75.2	20	18.3	6	5.5	1.30	Strength
Average Weighted Mean							1.35	Strength

1.00-1.66 = Strength; 1.67-2.33 = Weakness; 2.34- 3.00 = Does not apply

Table 4 shows the relevance of skills and abilities that the graduates acquired from university to their jobs. Overall, they evaluated the relevance of identified skills and abilities as Very High (WM=1.73). Ability to work independently topped the list of the skills and abilities. Other relevant skills and abilities are Teamwork or Team Orientation, ability to work under pressure and communication skills. However, the least relevant skills and abilities are entrepreneurship, writing skills, technical knowledge, and leadership skills. In connection to this, Gonzales, A. A. (14) found that human relations is beneficial to the respondents' job. Dimalibot, G.A., et al. (11) has different findings in that it is communication skills that contribute to the job placement of graduates. Edgar et al., as cited by Patimo, D.M. et al (15), considered communication and human relations skills as main attributes that may contribute to job application. This suggests that respondents of this study work in companies that recognize minimal supervision among its employees and who can work in a team and can work under pressure.

Results above indicated that teaching quality is considerably the strength of the program, followed by inter-disciplinary learning, student workload, and cost. Faculty force of the university in general is committed to quality education. Moreover, the university is considered as the melting pot of the south, students from different regions in Mindanao meet in this institution. Mixed class is also practiced in the university wherein different programs can enroll in a general education course. Cost is a strength as well because students paid only Php 85.00 tuition fee until 2011. However, it increased to P50.00 per unit in 2012 and P100.00 in 2015. From 2018 to present, tuition fee is free due to the implementation of Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (Republic Act No. 10931) signed by President Rodrigo R. Duterte on August 3, 2017. The said Act intends to give underprivileged Filipino students a better chance to finish their college degree. On the

other hand, the BS Tourism program must be strengthened in terms of facilities, research capacity, and industry linkages.

There were three superordinate themes when respondents evaluated the improvement for the program: (a) “more exposure of on-the-job training”, (b) “improve the facilities” and (c) “additional courses for more skills and abilities.” The respondents believe that students must have longer exposure to the different fields of tourism and hospitality management like exchange programs and out-of-country internships. Additional state-of-the-art facilities must be provided in the laboratory, and lastly, respondents expressed the need for additional courses that will strengthen the capability to handle workload in the industry.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study attempted to determine the employability of BS Tourism alumni of the Mindanao State University-Marawi. Based on the results, most of the respondents were female with age 27 to 31 years old. Majority were currently employed; however, some were laid-off and chose to go back to their provinces due to the pandemic that gravely affected the tourism and hospitality industry. They are working in a private sector in full-time status, and they got the job through referral. The skills and abilities to work independently, team orientation, work under pressure and communication skills are the most relevant to their jobs. Strong faculty force, interdisciplinary learning, student workload and cost are considered strengths of the program, but they evaluated that the program must also improve in terms of the facilities, research capacity, and industry linkages.

The findings of the study yield the following recommendations. First is to conduct a follow-up study in which the employers of the graduates are the respondents. Second is to propose enhancements of the curriculum to strengthen students’ research skills and integrate entrepreneurship as well. Celis, M. I. C., Festijo, B., & Cueto, A (16) stated that injecting entrepreneurship in the curriculum will give students strong foundation in the tourism and hospitality skills. Lastly, add and strengthen the existing industry linkages that can provide employment opportunities to the graduates.

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