

TRACER STUDY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE COLLEGE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT: *This study determined the status of Master in Public Administration and Doctor in Public Administration graduates of the University of Northern Philippines. It also elicited feedback from the graduates on school-related factors and curriculum, faculty, and school facilities. The study used a descriptive-quantitative method using a questionnaire to gather data. The frequency, mean, and percentage were the statistical tools applied in the interpretation of data. Results show that most of the graduates were already employed in the government service enjoying permanent status but occupying the rank-and-file position. The completion of a graduate degree increased the self-confidence, competence, and productivity of the graduates. They strongly recommended that the program is appropriate for government employees interested to pursue graduate studies. In addition, the graduates have a very high level of satisfaction with their curriculum, faculty, and facilities. On the other hand, suggestions for improvements may be considered particularly the classrooms, comfort rooms, internet, classroom ventilation and the limited reading resources in the library.*

Keywords: Tracer study, public administration, curriculum, satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Graduate education is at the apex of the educational programs of all academic institutions. At this level, graduates of baccalaureate degrees hone their skills, knowledge, and competence in their desire to be at par, competitive, or even better than other graduates. Today, a bachelor's degree is no longer a guarantee for one to find employment. In the academe, universities and colleges prefer applicants with master's or doctoral degrees. Even non-teaching personnel eyeing for higher positions such as department head are now required to finish a master's degree.

The University of Northern Philippines initially offered graduate programs, particularly Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.), in the late 1970s. It was in response to a need then as no institutions of higher learning in the province offer graduate studies. According to one of the pioneer faculty, M.P.A. was offered then by the Graduate School in consortium with the University of the Philippines. Subsequently, the Graduate School took over the program's handling when there were enough trained faculty in the early 1980s. The Doctor of Public Administration (D.P.A.) was added in 1994, followed subsequently by the offering of M.P.A. major in Police Administration (MPA-Pol. Adm.) By then, the Civil Service Commission required completing a master's degree as a prerequisite for public service promotion. The Public Administration program seeks to Provide students with the knowledge, practical and leadership skills in public policy and management; equip students with advanced research skills; and instill the values of participation, accountability, responsiveness, integrity, and transparency. Since then, many have availed of these programs from both government and private sector. Some have been promoted to high positions. One became a Regional Director of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, another as Assistant Provincial Commander of the PNP, a Provincial Director of the Civil Service Commission, and many others, to mention a few. However, it cannot be ascertained if the success of these graduates is largely attributed to the master or doctoral degree

they acquired. The conduct of a tracer study, therefore, is in order. A tracer study or graduate survey is a survey (in written or oral form) of graduates from education institutions, which occurs sometime after graduation or the end of the training. The subjects of a tracer study can be manifold. However, common topics include questions on study progress, the transition to work, work entrance, job career, learned competencies, current occupation, and bonds to the education institution. [1]

The dearth of knowledge on graduates' whereabouts and status, particularly at the graduate studies level in the College of Public Administration, makes this study a vital endeavor. Against this backdrop, there is a need and urgency to conduct a tracer study to determine the current status of the graduates, get their feedback on the programs' curriculum, faculty, facilities and their recommendations on how to improve further the programs which will re-down to improvement in the quality of graduates.

Academic institutions must not just be concerned about the number of graduates they produce year after year. The schools must also look into the qualities of the commodities (graduates) they produce if these meet standards or have even exceeded minimum expectations. One way of determining whether graduates indeed met or exceeded expectations is the conduct of a formal inquiry to determine their status and career path after completing their degree. The graduate and employer surveys is one form of empirical study that can provide valuable information for evaluating the results of the education and training of a specific institution of higher education[2] . This information may be used for further development of the institution in the context of quality assurance.

Both policies and program degrees need to be tailored-fit to the needs of the economy [3]. Considering the number of years since the inception of these graduate programs, a program evaluation study would be beneficial. Program evaluation is "the use of social science research methods by evaluators, administrators or practitioners to assess the

planning, implementation or outcome of social programs.[4]" The results can reveal practical information such as the right educational decisions, wasteful procedures, or the necessity to introduce a new program. An evaluation can also identify weak spots and address financial concerns [5]. It can, likewise, generate vital data, which would be helpful in program revision and enhancement.

Universities are encouraging efforts to improve their overall quality, including their graduates' profiles. The absorptivity of graduates in industries or users has become one of the indicators of graduates' profile quality [6]. Graduate tracer studies include follow-up and identifications of graduates from higher education institutions spurred by the need to give careful consideration to how graduates visualize the experiences they underwent during their degree studies and their transition to the world of employment [7]. Thus, Graduate tracer studies are recommended for exploring employment destinations and employability[8]. This is also an essential tools of institutional development to ensure the preparation of Higher Education Institutions and graduates to meet the challenges of 21st-century education [9]

There are three program evaluation levels: mega, macro, and micro. A macro assessment deals with an entire organization or corporation and what is typically looked into is the program's social and economic impact on the state [10]. On the other hand, a macro assessment is narrower in scope as it deals only with one branch of a corporation. In the case of a university, only one campus would be the focus of the study. In the absence of other campuses, the assessment focus could be limited to one division or department.

This research endeavor aimed to determine the status of the graduates of the Doctor of Public Administration, Master of Public Administration major in Governmental Administration, Master of Public Administration in Local Government, and Master of Public Administration major in Police Administration for the School year 2013 to the school year 2018.

It looked into the profile of the graduates, the extent to which the programs benefited them, the level of satisfaction on the state of school-related factors, and the perception of the usefulness of the degree earned in searching for a job. The findings may be used as baseline data in the crafting of policies to improve the program further. Moreover, the data to be gathered can be used as the bases for a policy decision by higher university authorities.

2. METHODS

The study employed a descriptive survey method of research. As used in the study, data were gathered through the use of a structured interview. Data were then tabulated and interpreted through statistical tools such as frequency, mean d percentage. The graduates of the three programs of the College of Public Administration (M.P.A.- Governmental Administration M.P.A. major in Local Government, MPA-Police Administration, and D.P.A.) during the last five school years (2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018)

were the subjects of the study. Total enumeration was attempted, but many of the subjects were no longer in the addresses indicated in their records. Extra efforts were exerted to locate them all but to no avail. Thus, only 48 of 69 graduates covering the five school year participated in the study

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Profile on Employment before Enrollment

Item	Yes	No	No Answer
Were they employed before enrollment?	43 (89.58%)	2 (4.17%)	3 (6.25%)

Table 1 shows that most of the graduates (43 or 89.58%) categorically stated that they were already employed when they enrolled to pursue graduate studies. Only two (4.17) stated that they were not employed, and three (6.25) have no answer. The findings may imply that there may be a needed action of the college to increase in the employability of tertiary graduates. There would be greater employment of the graduates if there is contact with the employment services as it plays a significant role in improving employment rates, even if the latter are low [11]. Due to stiff competition in the workplace, any graduate will experience difficulty landing a right job after graduation. Some of them may also want to rest for a couple of months before deciding to apply [12].

Table 2: Profile on Promotion after Graduation

Item	Yes	Partly	No Answer
Were they promoted after graduation?	35 (72.92%)	8 (16.67%)	5 (10.42%)

Table 2 presents that in terms of promotion, the majority (35 or 72.92%) of the respondents claimed that their graduate degree was of great help, eight (16.67%) said that they were promoted partly because of their master's degree, and five (10.42%) have no answers.

Table 3: Benefits gained

Benefits	Very much	Much	Not at all	Total
1. My self-confidence increased	42 (87.5%)	6 (12.5%)	-	48 100%
2. My competence as a professional was enhanced.	41 (85.42%)	7 (14.58%)	-	48 100%
3. It improved my productivity.	35 (72.92%)	13 (27.03%)	--	48 100%
4. It was helpful when I was looking for a job.	17 (35.42%)	10 (20.83%)	21 (43.75%)	48 100%

Table 3 reveals that "self-confidence increased" is probably the most significant benefit that the respondents derived from the completion of their graduate degree. The completion of a graduate degree tremendously boosted the confidence of the respondents. It is followed by item "my competence as a professional was enhanced" and item 3 "it improved my productivity", respectively. There is value to completing postgraduate education in the first year of practice [13]. Learning is the result of a complex interplay between educational institutions and the performance of students [14].

Table 4 - Respondents' Level of Satisfaction on School-Related Factor

	Mean	D.R.
Curriculum		
1. The course contents of the subjects are relevant to current realities.	4.70	SA
2. The topics discussed are related to my field of interest/specialization.	4.75	SA
3. The topics/course contents of the subjects are good enough for the semester.	4.72	SA
4. The requirements for the courses are reasonable.	4.33	SA
5. All the subjects comprising the curriculum are very relevant.	4.36	SA
Ave. Mean	4.57	Very high
Faculty		
1. The faculty show mastery of the subjects they taught.	4.86	SA
2. They explained well, gave examples, and used appropriate methods, which made learning easier.	4.76	SA
3. They were approachable, accommodating, and professional in dealing with their students.	4.73	SA
4. The requirements they asked to be submitted are realistic and manageable.	4.81	SA
5. They were just and fair in giving students' grades.	4.81	SA
6. They were punctual in starting and ending their classes.	4.84	SA
Ave. Mean	4.80	Very high
School facilities		
1. The classrooms are clean, adequately ventilated, and with enough chairs for the students.	4.54	SA
2. The comfort rooms are clean.	4.12	SA
3. There are enough available computers and LCDs to be used in the class for PowerPoint presentations.	4.46	SA
4. The classrooms are conducive for learning.	4.62	SA
5. There are good reading materials in the library.	4.43	SA
Ave. mean	4.43	Very high
Overall Mean	4.60	Very high

As a whole, the data show that the respondents appear to be highly satisfied with all the school-related factors as indicated by the overall mean of 4.60, which is described as very high. This tends to imply that the respondents were very much contented with all that was described in the items under each of the school-related factors such as the curriculum, faculty, and facilities. The respondents' highest satisfaction is with faculty since it gained the highest mean (4.80), which implies that highly competent professors handle the MPA/DPA programs.

It should be noted that almost all the professors are D.P.A. graduates except for one who has two master's degrees (M.P.A., M.B.A.). The quality of students' performance in

Technological Education is influenced by many factors such as facilities, equipment, hand tools, instruction, methodology, and the students [15]. a well-planned and responsive to societal changes curriculum may likely yield tangible results which will eventually benefit the stakeholders; a well-designed, strictly adhered and relevant policies and programs coupled with collaborative efforts by the administrators, faculty members, students and other stakeholders may result to positive effects beneficial to the educational community. Thus, it is recommended that the College may continue designing policies to address the emerging needs of the educational community; participation of the stakeholders along curriculum and instruction should be evidently manifested; and lastly, a well-designed monitoring and feedback mechanism should be carefully planned and be established [16].

Table 5 - Perception of the Usefulness of the Degree earned in Searching for a Job

Overall Usefulness of the Degree Earned	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	11	22.91%
Partially, Yes	9	18.75%
No, I already have a job	21	43.75%)
No Answer	7	14.58

A great number (21 or 43.75%) stated that the degree was not useful since they were already employed. There were 11 (22.91%) who said it was helpful, nine (18.75%) said only partially, and seven (14.58%) have no answer. This support the result of another study as they found out that 33% of their graduates perceived their degree to be useful and only 2% said it was not useful [17]. Quality education and training were provided to the graduates as proven by the employment of most of them in private entities in jobs related to their course within six months after their graduation [18].

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the College of Public Administration graduates were already in the government service when they enrolled and pursued a Master's in Public Administration. Many of them were promoted, with a substantial number of them occupying middle-level positions and receiving a high monthly salary. They strongly recommend the MPA/DPA programs to others, particularly government employees, apparently because of the benefits expected to be derived from completing a graduate degree, such as an increase in self-confidence, competence, and improved productivity. Respondents are highly satisfied with the faculty and facilities of the college. However, many of them expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects, which they amplified in their comments. Many were particularly unhappy with the state of the classrooms and comfort rooms, the inaccessibility of the internet, inadequate ventilation of the classrooms, and the limited reading resources in the library.

It is imperative to upgrade the school facilities, particularly the classrooms and comfort rooms, in light of the preceding. Renovation or restoration can be a remedy but constructing a new C.P.A. building is a better option. Upgrading must

include providing internet access to the classrooms and the acquisition of more updated and relevant reading materials. Lastly, the faculty involved in the MPA/DPA programs should maintain or further improve instruction quality to be worthy of being the only CHED-recognized service provider in the entire north of the country. Other recommendations, conduct another study that will encompass a larger number of respondents; similar studies should be conducted in the graduate studies of the College of Public Administration; the university in general through the college in particular should establish a partnership with other agencies to further increase the employment or promotion of its graduates, and the college should also gather feedback from the employers of its graduates to evaluate their work performance [18]. Finally, the researchers extend their utmost gratitude to the University of Northern Philippines administration, particularly the University Research Office, for the financial support that made the completion of this endeavor possible

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