

Tracer Study on the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management Graduates

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Abstract – This study aimed to trace the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management graduates of the University of Northern Philippines from 2015-2017. It employed a descriptive survey method of research. The researchers primarily used Facebook, email, and other social media in reaching out to the graduates. The data gathered were analyzed and interpreted using frequency, ranking, and weighted mean. The results showed that most of the graduates are employed and are occupying a position relevant to their degree. The subjects taught during their college days have been essential to their competitiveness in the work-field. However, the graduates lack some of the national certifications issued by Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). The latter is one of the reasons why most graduates are working inside the country and have a hard time applying abroad. Thus, the college should create a linkage to TESDA and apply as an assessment center for these national certifications. Moreover, the college should exert much effort to communicate to the potential enrollees through job or career coaching about the work opportunities for the courses.

Keywords: tracer study, hospitality and tourism management, college graduates

1. Introduction

Employment of graduates is the primary goal of any institution of higher learning. The employability of graduates indicates how well the institution has prepared its graduates in terms of knowledge and skills needed by the industry. Employing an expanding population is one of the most significant challenges nations must have to face at present. It is particularly acute in developing countries where the rate of population growth far outstrips job opportunities (Ramirez et al., 2014).

Navarro et al. (2003) described employability as a measure of the productivity of education because it reflects the economic value added to the person who underwent the educative process. Accordingly, one indicator that a school has fulfilled its mission statement is the employability of its graduates.

No higher education institution (HEI) operates only for profits. The employability of graduates understandably is the main priority. The University of Northern Philippines (UNP) is not

an exemption to this mission. With its vision of becoming an institution anchored on excellence and global competitiveness, graduates' employability is the measure of how well it has fulfilled its mission; thus, the need for a tracer study.

A tracer study is an impact assessment tool where the "impact on target groups is traced back to specific elements of a project or programme so that effective and ineffective project components may. Educational researches describe graduate surveys as analyses of the relationship between higher education and work (Millington, 2003). They likewise associate tracer study to a graduate or alumni survey since its target group are former students. They provide quantitative-structural data on employment and career, the character of work and related competencies, and information on the professional orientation and experiences of their graduates (Schomburg, 2003).

Quario (2004) stated that the quest for excellence is a fundamental objective of higher education institutions which carries with its

enormous responsibilities. Colleges and universities face an evolving and more demanding environment that has forced them to become more adaptive and flexible, facing pressure to realize that their graduates should compete in an increasingly global market place. Thus, colleges and universities need to ensure that they maintain a sound, balanced, and organized academic program based on standards, policies, and guidelines to enhance student development. So, Higher Education Institutions widely use tracer studies to determine desirable information as to what is happening to their graduates at the work field. It also through tracer studies that they find out how effective their curricular offering and how adequate were the trainings they provided in the enhancement of their graduates' skills, competencies, and work-related values. Ramirez et al. (2014) stated that tracer study is significant for the following reasons: (1) for the academic department to help assess/evaluate the curricular programs of the university; (2) for the other higher institutions to compare what program offerings are best fitted and in demand in the job market; and (3) for the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to aid their curricular committee in the designing/redesigning of the programs to be offered and served to the students.

The study of Campos et al. (2011) laid down the possible reasons why there are graduates who are employed and unemployed. Consequently, it presented a feedback mechanism for the department and college to develop a more productive, competitive, and effective program for the students.

In determining the employability of the graduates of Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management of one State College in the Philippines, De Castro (2017) found that majority of the graduates are successfully employed locally, most of whom are working on in the hotels and fast-food stores. Only a few are working internationally because of extreme qualification and ample requirements. Majority acquired their first job in less than three months while, ironically, the graduates still had a struggle in finding a job due to few job vacancies or lack of positions or items in government agencies.

The continuous increase in the number of graduates narrows down employment opportunities as well. There has not been any tracer study conducted on the graduates of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management in the University of Northern Philippines.

The Bachelor of Science in Tourism was first offered by the College of Arts and Sciences by Board Resolution No. 41 in 1996. The first batch of Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Administration Straight Program was in 2001. In 2007, by Board Resolution No. 54, it was revised as a Ladderized Program based at the College of Business Administration and Accountancy. However, in 2012, it was reverted as a straight program because of some other considerations like TESDA compliance. Owing to the growth of the hospitality and tourism industry and the increased demand for hospitality and tourism workers, the number of enrolments in the two programs significantly increased. The university officials then decided to merge these two programs into one college in 2014, which is now the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to trace the BS Hotel and Restaurant Administration and BS Tourism Graduates of 2015, 2016, and 2017 of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, University of Northern Philippines. Specifically, it sought to determine the following: (1) graduates' eligibility profile, (2) employment status, (3) competencies learned, and (4) subjects that are useful in current work.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

One famous theory that grounds a tracer study's objective of determining the effectiveness of a course or program curriculum through the graduates' employment status, the competencies they learned, and their subjects in their college which they find useful in their works is John Dewey's Curriculum Theory. According to this theory, the curriculum should not be presented as finished intellections. Rather, curriculum should build an orderly sense of the world where the

students live and therefore goes through continuing enhancement. The curriculum's enhancement should always include the growing needs of the industry, so that after their graduation in college, the graduates will have more knowledge about the field of work they are about to enter. In short, the students should already start gaining experience and confidence through the curriculum (Simpson, et.al., 2013).

Dewey argued that curriculum should be relevant to students' lives. He believed that learning by doing and development of practical life skills are crucial to students' education.

Furthermore, Dewey connects both the educative process and educational theory with the students' involvement or interaction with particular societal aims, meanings and values that emerge from adult experience.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey method of research. Survey questionnaires were adopted from Pardo and Pichay (2017) with slight modifications for the purpose of the academic programs under study. Experts were consulted for the content validity of the questionnaires.

2.2. Subjects of the Study

The majority of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management graduates finished their degree at the age of 23, where there are 120 male and 230 female students, respectively. Almost all of the students are single, while only a few were married before their graduation.

2.3. Data Gathering Tools

This study used a survey questionnaire as the main data instrument in gathering data from the respondents. Documentation was used to gather data on the number and home addresses of the respondents.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers acquired data by sending the survey questionnaires to the graduates through Facebook, electronic mail, and other social media platforms. Data gatherers were also employed to distribute and retrieve the questionnaires through the aforementioned means.

2.5. Data Analysis

The graduates' responses were interpreted by employing descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage as well as weighted mean and ranking.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

This research raised sensitive ethical issues. Consent of the respondents was first secured. The researchers gave respondents the proper orientation on the objectives and the benefits of conducting the study. Respondents were also guaranteed of their safety from social, behavioral, and psychological harm that may result from the undertaking. They were ensured that all information taken from them was treated with utmost confidentiality. No monetary incentive or any form of compensation was given. There was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Eligibility Profile of the Graduates

Tracer study is essential to help assess or evaluate the curricular programs of the university through their graduates. Thus, the study specifically determined the graduates' profile of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

Figure 1 shows the profile of graduates along with eligibilities/competencies passed. The majority of the respondents have a National Certificate II in Food and Beverage Services followed by National Certificate II in Front Office issued and awarded by TESDA. The Food and Beverage Services National Certificate II assesses food preparation competency for any

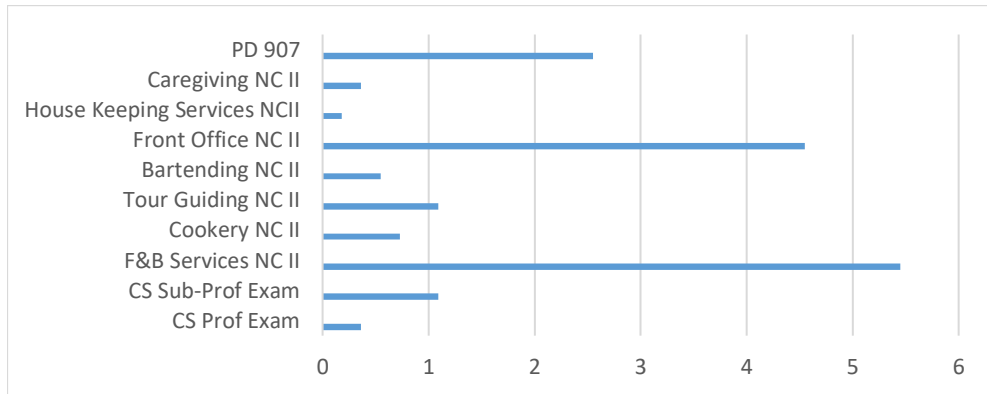


Figure 1. Profile of the Graduates along Eligibilities/Competencies

establishment that serves food. It can lead to a job such as a food attendant/food server. On the other hand, Front Office Services NC II assesses the competency of the individual to receive and process the reservation, guest registration, check-in, and check out in lodging establishments, as well as on how to operate reservation systems, provide reception, conduct night audit, and other services.

These acquired competencies will lead them to positions such as Reservations Agent, Front Office Agent, Receptionists, Bellman or Porter, and Concierge.

The certification from TESDA can be a strong credential in applying for a position in the hospitality and tourism industry, particularly in the food and beverage and accommodation sector. Most of the graduates perceived that they will land a job connected with food and beverage services and front office services. Most of the time, these are entry-level positions in the hospitality and tourism industry. De Castro (2017) referred to these as the most straightforward jobs.

3.2. Employment Status of the Graduates

Determining the graduates' employment status is vital in assessing how effective the curricular offering and how adequate the college's training to its graduates as they enter the industry.

Figure 2 shows the present employment status of graduates.

The majority of the graduates are working with a frequency of 250 or 71.43 %. Almost all are

working in private institutions (238 or 95.20%), and the rest are holding a position in government offices (12 or 4.80%). As per the employment status, out of 250 respondents are holding contractual position with a frequency of 88 or 35.20%.

This is similar to the results of the study of Celis et al. (2013) entitled "Graduate's Employability: A Tracer Study for Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management", wherein the majority of the HRM graduates are contractual (29%) and temporary (26.92%) with 8 percent self-employed. Their study also added that the hospitality and tourism industry, like any other industry, strictly adheres to employment status policy. Unfortunately, some of these hospitality and tourism establishments made a paradigm shift in regularizing their employees. They utilize an outsourcing mechanism that unloads them from their regularization responsibilities. This new mechanism hinders the HRM graduates' possibilities to be permanent. It is not easy to be a regular employee in a hospitality and tourism business establishment. If the management is committed to a very high standard of service, work experience, technical and management skills, knowledge or mastery of the field are just a few qualities an employee should possess to obtain a regular or permanent position in the world where the battle is about competitiveness.

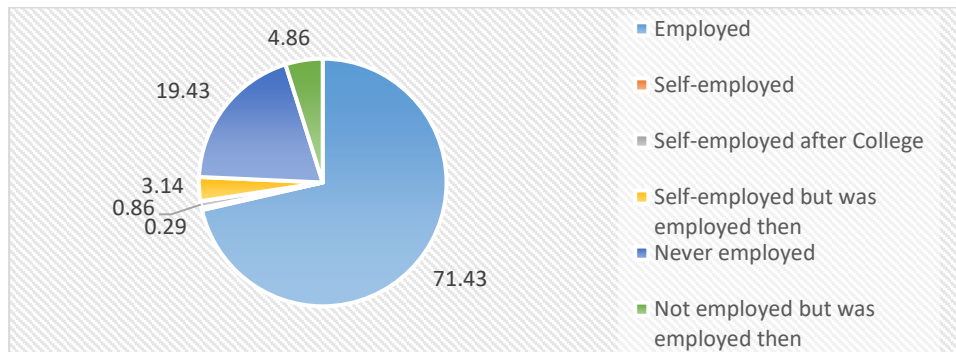


Figure 2. *Present Employment Status Profile of the Graduates*

Almost all of the graduates are presently employed in a relevant position and currently employed in their first jobs. It could mean that there is a high demand in the hospitality and tourism industry, and the aim to supply the demand of the industry is somehow being met. Also, the graduates got their first job after 1 to 6 months. This came out in the study of Dimalibot, et al. (2013) entitled "Employment Status of the Tourism Graduates of Batch 2013". In terms of job search length, 22 or 44% of the graduates are employed within six months 12 or 24% of the graduates are employed within one year, while six or 12% had reached within three months before they got into work.

Due to the stiff competition in the workplace, any graduate will experience difficulty landing a job right after graduation. Some of them may also want to rest for a couple of months before deciding to apply. Hence, it may be safe that a graduate of hospitality and tourism courses will not have to wait for a very long period to acquire his or her first job. As such can be influenced high demand in the present industry. However, graduates are employed locally than internationally. Applying abroad is a tough battle that one must be ready in terms of experience. Some, if not all, of the positions abroad need a least two years of relevant work experience before an applicant can assume the job. Graduates are trying to meet these minimum requirements, and some preferred locally, like any other courses.

Out of 206 respondents currently employed, 100 are employed in hotels locally and internationally, such as Vigan Plaza Hotel, Hotel

Salcedo de Vigan, Hotel Luna, Sofitel, Fort Ilocandia Resort Hotel, to name a few. 59 are working in restaurants as Food Attendant/Food Server/Food Handler/Dining Crew/Dining Staff/F and B Attendant/Waiter/Food Dispatcher.

The study of De Castro (2017) entitled "Tracer Study of Hotel and Restaurant Management Graduates of One State College in the Philippines from 2014-2016" ranked the service crew job or occupation as number 1. It may imply that as long as there are food and beverage, accommodation, events, and transportation, a hospitality and tourism graduate can hold a position in these establishments. That is why job opportunities are very high because of the industry's high demand.

According to CHED Memorandum Order no 30, Series of 2006, job position is just one of the many carrier paths of hospitality and tourism graduates. These are entry-level positions wherein experience is not a requirement. Anyone can have the position as long as the degree that they have obtained is relevant to the job. A significant percentage of respondents are receiving 5,001-10,000 gross monthly salary. On the other hand, the graduates accepted their first job because they believed it was related to the course/program. It could mean that they want to practice what they have learned so that their efforts for four years will not come to waste. Moreover, some of the reasons why graduates are not yet employed are due to family concerns and one's decision not to find a job. It could mean that after graduation, the graduate is forced not to find a job or quit his or her job because of some uncontrollable

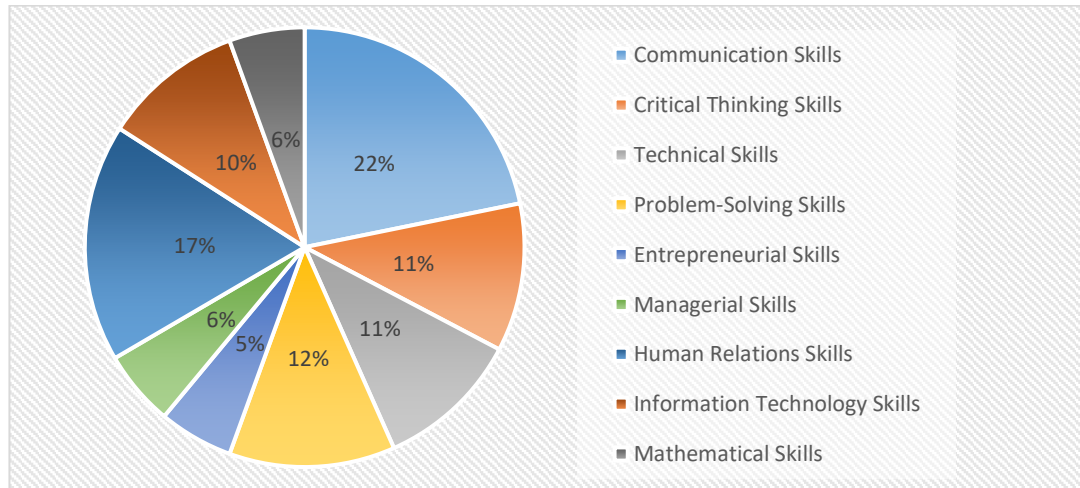


Figure 3. *Competencies Learned of the Graduates that Became Very Useful after Graduation*

events such as pregnancy, or when a family member got sick, or other personal reasons.

3.3. Different Competencies Learned

Identifying the different competencies learned in college which became very useful after graduation is another significant thing to assess the university's quality education.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of the graduates in terms of the different competencies learned. Communication skills got the highest proportion, with 22% as the graduates' most useful competency. It could mean that the capability to communicate orally or through written communication is necessary for a hospitality or tourism graduate to sell the products. One must have to deal with many guests' or clients' inquiries and talk to them to make sure full understanding. The study of Fronda et al. (2015) states that the graduates found the need for hospitality industry workers to be skilled in talking to people and presenting themselves well in front of customers. The study of Dimalibot, et al. (2013) states that communication skills, either oral or written, had the most significant impacts on job placement. The researchers also add that employees must have strong communication skills, as they have to communicate with one another and with supervisors. Some employees working in customer service must also

communicate directly with customers. Practical communication skills are essential to ensure written emails are straightforward, documents are readable, and speech during a presentation is clean and professional.

3.4. Subjects Useful in Current Work

Principles of Hygiene, Safety, and Sanitation with Basic Nutrition are considered important courses under the general education subjects. These subjects present the value of safety, sanitation, and hygiene and sound practices. It provides an orientation on various hazards such as garbage disposal procedures, pest management, and accident prevention in the establishment and factors involved in food safety to prevent an outbreak of food-borne illnesses and intoxication. The subject also tackles basic knowledge of nutrition.

Meanwhile, Convention Management ranked first among all the professional subjects in all the programs. The convention industry is flourishing globally, and most of the employed respondents are working in food and beverage establishments. They are exposed to these events every time they have a function or catering service.

Under the business core, the Principles of Management is essential. Hospitality and Tourism programs are not only about special skills. It also

has something to do with how to manage the two essential resources, people and materials.

On the Tourism Core, Tourism Planning and Development is crucial. The subject presents an overview of the tourism planning process, contemporary models of tourism planning and development (emphasizing sustainable tourism principles), various levels of tourism planning, and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities such as government-industry non-governmental organizations and local communities. These principles in tourism planning and development are beneficial, so the respondents believe in their usefulness.

Lastly, on the BS HRA program's significant subjects, Food and Beverage Service Procedures is essential. The subject provided the graduates the knowledge, skills, and attitude necessary to perform the duties, tasks, and steps required of a Food and Beverage Service Attendant in various food and beverage outlets. It also provided the graduates with sufficient knowledge to make decisions about food and wine service styles, procedures, and workflow in a hospitality environment. On the other hand, for the BS Tourism program, respondents want to work in the aviation industry. It can be why the subject of Air Travel and Management is essential. This subject gave a broad knowledge of the aviation and air travel industry. It also provided a review of aviation-related businesses and organizations and their role in shaping the industry.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Most of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management graduates of 2015–2017 are working locally, occupying a position relevant to their degree. Also, most of these graduates got their first job. Only a few are working outside the country because of strict requirements such as work experience.

Most of them are working in hotels and restaurants with entry-level positions such as Front Desk Clerk, Food Attendant/Server, and Room/Housekeeping Attendant wherein job experience is not a requirement of these hospitality and tourism business establishments in the locality.

A significant number of respondents are contractual in status since regularization in the hospitality and tourism industry is not that constant, especially if the establishment is committed to a very high service standard. In terms of salary, most of the respondents are earning just enough, especially those working inside the country compared to those working abroad. Even if these graduates are earning just enough, they still accepted the job because it is related to the course/program of study, career challenges, and special skills. Graduates are highly employable because of the short duration in looking for their first job. It is because of the high demand in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Despite the high demand for the workforce in the hospitality and tourism industry, some graduates are unemployed. Some of them did not find a job due to some family concerns that describe the value of Ilocanos for family ties.

Lastly, different competencies learned during college are being applied by the graduates in the workplaces that make them more competitive and become an asset in the organization, such as communication, human relation, and problem-solving skills.

Subjects taught to these graduates when they were still in college are given importance. These subjects are appreciated because the theories and principles that they learned are useful in their present jobs and workplaces.

The majority of the graduates do not have eligibility and certifications such as National Certificate II in Food and Beverage Services, Housekeeping, Cookery, Tour Guiding, to name a few. Together with its faculty and staff, the Dean should create a policy mandating all their students to take these national certifications before they graduate. The college should also apply as an assessment center for these national certifications and should create a linkage to TESDA. It is also an excellent opportunity to generate income that will benefit the college and the students.

Not having a national certificate issued by TESDA can also be a reason why the graduates are working in the country. The graduates are having difficulty applying abroad because they lack some of the requirements/eligibility to make them more competitive, and ready in the international arena.

The demand for the workforce in the hospitality and tourism industry is very high. The university and the college should exert much effort to communicate to the potential enrollees about the job opportunities after graduation through job or career coaching. The percentage of enrollees will increase, and the graduates of hospitality and tourism courses will be enough to supply the increasing demand for human resources in that field if done correctly and effectively.

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