

Tracer Study of Liberal Arts Graduates of UM Digos College (2006 – 2010)

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ABSTRACT

This study traced the graduates of Liberal Arts Program of UM Digos College who graduated in 2006 up to 2010. Specifically, it sought to gather the demographic and employment profiles of the graduates. It also ascertained the competencies learned in college that the graduates find useful in their workplace. This research made use of descriptive research design using a simplified version of the CHED Graduate Tracer Survey Form. Results reveal that there is a high degree of employability among graduates of the Liberal Arts Program of the UM Digos College. Nine out of ten graduates are currently employed in various industries. Considering the majority of the respondents are new graduates, they occupy rank and file positions but they show good career movement potential. The communication skills and human relations skills they have learned in UMDC have helped them in securing their jobs and doing their work well. Based on the findings, it is recommended that courses relating to communication skills be further enhanced to give UMDC graduates a competitive advantage in the world of work. It is also recommended the Basis Management Strategies be included in the curriculum to fast-track the careers of LA graduates in order to increase the number of alumni in higher job positions.

Keywords: tracer study, liberal arts, UM Digos, 2006-2010

INTRODUCTION

A tracer study is an empirical description of the employability of the graduates of higher education institutions. It is also an indicator of industry relevance and driver of policy imperatives (Weixiang, 1987). Furthermore, it provides quantitative data on employment and career, the character of work and related competencies, and information on the professional orientation and experiences of their graduates (Feal, 2007) making universities development hubs (Hansen & Lehmann, 2006).

Tracing the whereabouts of the graduates is a popular way of determining the relationship between the educational training and work (Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2010). Information gathered included the employment data, job relevance and employability rate to find out whether the program curriculum is industry responsive or not. Such information becomes a basis for curriculum revision. However, the requisites to have a successful survey of the graduates are monetary resources, time and effort (Pena et al., 1992).

Nowadays, a tertiary institution` role goes beyond just the production of graduates. Rather, it has also to keep track of the employment status of every alumna or alumnus (Lutwana & Kigongo – Bukenya, 2004; Cosser, 2003) because this information is relevant to the school as it tries to be updated about the current working situations of its graduates.

Tracer studies provide the information needed to reform educational programs, seek patterns of industry employment and curriculum offerings to enhance academic relevance and marketability (Zembere & Chinyama, 2013). Tracer results are valuable inasmuch as they can be used by school planners for reforms and enhancement (Millington, 2006). Tracer studies also serve as guide in making decisions like to discontinue offering an irrelevant course, or open a new one.

The Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines (CHED) is empowered to monitor higher education institutions on the implementation of their tripartite roles namely instruction, research, and extension services. Likewise, it is bent to stratify institutional roles, upgrade standards and increase the schools` effectiveness. One good measure of a schools` effectiveness is the employability of its alumni. It is on this premise that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) track down their graduates, putting premium on their job assignment and employment background.

This study aimed to obtain information on the employment profile of the Liberal Arts graduates of UM Digos College over the period of 2006 to 2010. Specifically, it sought to describe the demographic profile of the Liberal Arts graduates of UM Digos College and to describe their employment profiles.

METHOD

This research made use of the descriptive research design as it intended to determine existing conditions anchored on a pre-determined strand of questions in order to achieve a specific response from a target group of respondents (Alicay, 2014). This study is a purposive process of gathering, classifying and tabulating, and analyzing data in order to describe the respondents' demographic and employment profiles.

The survey respondents were Liberal Arts alumni of UM Digos College who graduated in 2006 up to 2010. All graduates were invited to participate in the survey, however, the effort resulted to a retrieval rate of only 31% with the year 2010 having the most number of respondents.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents*

Year	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%
2006	31	4	13
2007	30	3	10
2008	30	7	23
2009	31	4	13
2010	30	12	40
TOTAL	97	30	100

For the data interpretation purposes, frequency counts and percentages were used in order to describe the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Liberal Arts Graduates

Shown in Table 2 is the profile of the respondents in terms of gender, civil status, and specialization. There were more male respondents than females. Most of the respondents were single who specialized in English Language.

Table 2. *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

PROFILE	<i>f</i>	%
GENDER		
Male	14	47.0
Female	16	53.0
CIVIL STATUS		
Single	19	63.0
Married	11	37.0
SPECIALIZATION		
English Language	24	80.0
Political Science	6	20.0
TOTAL	30	100.0

Employment Profile of Liberal Arts Graduates

Almost all of the traced graduates are employed which is a good indication of the effectiveness of the institution of producing graduates that match the requirements of industry. According to Sicat (2003), job satisfaction related to the educational attainment of the applicant which matches the job vacancy.

Table 3. *Employment Status of Respondents*

STATUS	<i>f</i>	%
Employed	29	97.0
Unemployed	1	3.0
TOTAL	30	100.0

Shown in Table 4 is the place of work of the respondents. It reveals that only a small margin is employed abroad while the bulk (93%) of the respondents works in the country. This is a good indication not only of the availability of job opportunities for them in the country but also of their willingness to stay and serve the country.

Table 4. *Geography of Employment*

Location	<i>f</i>	%
Local	27	93.0
Abroad	2	7.0
TOTAL	29	100.0

Table 5 shows the various industries where the graduates were able to find work. Results reveal that four in every ten of the graduate respondents were able to find work in the trade industry while two in every ten found work either in Education or Public Safety and Defense. About 14% are into communication – related jobs.

Table 5. *Industry of Employment*

STATUS	<i>f</i>	%
Public Safety and Defense	6	21.0
Manufacturing	2	7.0
Trade	12	41.0
Education	5	17.0
Communication	4	14.0
TOTAL	29	100.0

From the public safety and defense industry specifically in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), two graduates are sergeant combatants while four (4) into the Philippine National Police (PNP) having a Police Officer I (PO1) ranks. For manufacturing workers, one (1) works in Canada as farm caretaker and one (1) in Singapore as factory worker. In the academe, five (5) work as teachers, one (1) as college instructor, two (2) high school teachers, and one (1) elementary teacher and one (1) pre-school teacher. In the communication sector, two (2) were able to get jobs as radio anchormen, while two (2) are communication desk supervisors at call centers.

The ability of the graduates to find employment beyond their discipline is a strong proof of their work resilience and cannot be considered as mismatch (Carlson and Theodore, 1997). Workers are finding employment in their immediate vicinity and use endemic skills so as not to travel to other places (McLafferty and Preston, 1996) which prove effective among the UM graduates as they are employed in industries where they can maximize their skills.

Figure 1 depicts the waiting time of UM Liberal Arts graduates to find a job. Twenty – four per cent of the graduates landed a job within six months after graduation while 41% were hired six months to one year after graduation. This indicates a high employability rate of 65% within one year.

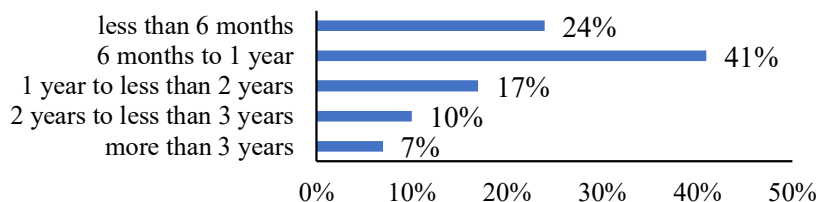
Figure 1. *Employability Rate of UMDC Liberal Arts Graduates*

Table 6 stipulates the rank and position occupied by the graduates in their respective jobs. It is noted that most of them occupy clerical positions but this is not surprising since most of the respondents were recent graduates. The two respondents occupying managerial position were graduates five and three years ago respectively.

Table 6. *Employment Rank/ Position of Graduates*

Position	<i>f</i>	%
Clerical	24	83.0
Technical	2	7.0
Managerial	2	7.0
Self-Employed	1	3.0
TOTAL	29	100.0

Presented in Table 7 are some information about their career and employment. Twenty out of 29 respondents are still on their first job while 9 have already change jobs. Major reason for loyalty towards their first jobs is proximity of work to their residence followed by salaries and benefits. Salary level and other incentives (Sicat, 2003) may also add attraction to the workers and the job seekers. A greater number of workers in Davao del Sur are enjoying a minimum wage which improves the loyalty – to – work climate of the workers (Tolentino & Catalina, 2008) which might also be the case of the graduates. On the other hand, major reasons for changing jobs are the nature of work which is related to the course as well as salaries and benefits.

Results reveal that majority (66%) consider their degree as relevant to their current jobs. Although many of the respondents are employed in various industries, their course (English) is very relevant because effective communication is always needed and important in any kind of job.

Table 7. *Career and Employment*

Indicator	<i>f</i>	%
Is this your first job?		
Yes	20	69.0
No	9	31.0
Reasons for staying on first job?		
Salaries and Benefits	5	25.0
Career Challenges	2	10.0
Job Related to Course	3	15.0
Proximity of Job to Residence	6	30.0
Peer Influence	2	10.0
Family Influence	2	10.0
Other Reasons		
Reasons for changing jobs		
Salaries and Benefits	3	33.0
Career Challenges	1	11.0
Job Related to Course	3	33.0
Proximity of Job to Residence	2	22.0
Other Reasons		
TOTAL	29	100.0

Table 8. *Relevance of Course to Present Job*

Response	<i>f</i>	%
Relevant	19	66.0
Not Relevant	10	34.00
TOTAL	29	100.0

The graduates were also asked about the learned competencies in college but they found useful in the workplace. Survey results reveal that the communication skills as well as the human relations skills they have learned in school helped them. Communication skills are very important because first of all, any graduate needs good communication skills to pass a job interview.

When in the workplace, he/she needs to request information, give information, and interact with co-workers, supervisors and clients. He/she can do this well if he/she has the appropriate communication skills. For the same reasons, one has to have the necessary human relation skills. The workers' social and work effectiveness are enhanced if he/she learns how to interact with co-workers.

Table 9. *Learned Competencies Useful at Work*

Competency	<i>f</i>	%
Communication Skills	17	59.0
Human Relation Skills	8	28.0
Critical Thinking Skills	1	3.0
Information Tech Skills	2	7.0
Entrepreneurial Skills	1	3.0
TOTAL	29	100.0

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a high degree of employability among graduates of the Liberal Arts program of the UM Digos College. Nine out of ten graduates are currently employed in various industries. Considering the majority of the respondents are new graduates, they occupy rank and file positions but they show good career movement potential. The communication skills and human relations skills they have learned in UMDC have helped them in securing their jobs and doing their work well.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that courses relating to communication skills be further enhanced to give UMDC graduates a competitive advantage in the world of work. It is also recommended the Basis Management Strategies be included in the curriculum to fast-track the careers of LA graduates in order to increase the number of alumni in higher job positions.

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