

Tracer Study of Graduate School Graduates in a Catholic University

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Abstract— This study traces the trajectory of graduates from the School of Graduate Studies and Continuing Professional Development at the University of Saint Louis (USL), delving into their profile, employment status, perceived relevance of school-related factors, and competencies acquired during their studies. Utilizing a descriptive research design, data was collected from 112 graduates from 1997 to 2023 through a questionnaire adapted from the University Research and Development Center. The results unveil a diverse cohort of graduates, with the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master in Public Administration (MPA) emerging as popular choices. Notably, a consistent engagement with graduate studies is observed, marked by peaks in 2023 and 2018. Gender diversity is evident, with a majority of female graduates reflecting strides towards inclusivity. The study underscores the successful transition of graduates into the workforce, as evidenced by a high employment rate and stability in permanent positions. Curriculum and instruction, research, and academic requirements are deemed highly relevant, emphasizing the importance of a well-structured educational experience. Faculty members play a pivotal role in guidance and mentorship. Competencies acquired during graduate studies, including research and communication skills, management, work ethic, and teamwork, are perceived as instrumental in achieving work goals. The holistic approach to professional development within the graduate programs is evident.

Keywords— *Tracer Study, Graduates, Employment Profile, Skills*

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the realities of the academic world today, universities must do more than just teach students. They must also support the preservation of a competitive economy and, above all, ensure that graduates can fulfill their aspirations of finding employment, gaining recognition from their peers, and succeeding in their chosen fields (Albina & Sumagaysay, 2020; Gines, 2014). On the other hand, a significant contributing reason to underemployment and job search difficulties is graduates' incapacity to fulfill industry standards for skills and abilities (Nadarajah, 2021).

In the dynamic landscape of higher education, assessing the impact and efficacy of graduate programs is paramount for academic institutions (Dela Cruz, 2022). The University of Saint Louis (USL), committed to providing quality education, recognizes the importance of understanding the trajectories and achievements of its graduate school graduates. As an institution dedicated to academic excellence, USL aims to continually enhance its graduate programs, ensuring they remain aligned with the evolving needs of industries and society. This tracer study is a proactive initiative to gather valuable insights into the professional journeys of our graduate school alumni. By exploring their employment status, job satisfaction, further education pursuits, and career progression, the University seeks to gain a nuanced understanding of the long-term impact of its graduate programs on the lives of its graduates.

A tracer study plays an important role in the continuous improvement and quality assurance of educational programs (Menez, 2014). By systematically tracking and evaluating the outcomes of graduate school graduates, institutions gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their curricula, teaching methodologies, and overall program structures (Bueno, 2017). This evaluation is crucial for identifying both

strengths and areas that require enhancement. The data collected through tracer studies enable institutions to ensure that their programs remain relevant to the evolving needs of industries and society, thereby maintaining high educational standards (Ramirez et al., 2014). Additionally, the findings contribute to the ongoing process of curriculum enhancement, allowing institutions like USL to tailor their graduate programs to provide students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the workforce. Ultimately, tracer studies foster a culture of continual improvement within educational institutions, ensuring they consistently deliver high-quality education and produce graduates well-equipped for their professional journeys (Kamaruddin et al., 2021; Ma'dan et al., 2020).

This study was conducted to trace the graduates of the School of Graduate Studies and Continuing Professional Development of the University of Saint Louis and sought to determine their profile variables, employment profile, School-related Factors that are relevant in the graduate studies, and Competencies acquired in the Graduate Studies that contributed to the achievement of work goals.

II. METHODS

Descriptive research design was used to trace graduate employability and employment status of the graduates of the School of Graduate Studies and Continuing Professional Development of the University of Saint Louis. There were 112 graduates that were traced from 1997-2023.

The questionnaire was taken from the University Research and Development Center, and the items were based on CHED mandates for tracing university graduates. Modifications were made by the researchers to suit the present study being undertaken. Personal distribution was done through the help of friends and colleagues. Other respondents were traced through email and Facebook accounts. Data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted using frequency counts, percentage distribution, and rank.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Profile of Graduates of the School of Graduate Studies of University of Saint Louis

Variables	Program	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate Program Completed	DBM	6	5.2
	DEM	1	.9
	EDD	5	4.3
	MAED	2	1.7
	MAED/MAT	19	16.5
	MBA	22	19.1
	MIT/MSIT	8	7.0
	MOE	15	13.0
	MPA	28	24.3
	MSN	6	5.2
	Total	112	100

Year Graduated	Year Graduated	Frequency	Percentage
Year Graduated	1997.00	1	.9
	2000.00	1	.9
	2005.00	1	.9
	2008.00	1	.9
	2010.00	1	.9
	2012.00	10	8.9
	2013.00	2	1.8
	2014.00	6	5.4
	2015.00	8	7.1
	2016.00	7	6.3
	2017.00	8	7.1
	2018.00	10	8.9
	2019.00	8	7.1
	2021.00	7	6.3
	2022.00	13	11.6
	2023.00	28	25.0
	Total	112	100
Gender	Female	67	60.36
	Male	44	39.64
	Total	111	100
Civil Status	Married	68	61.82
	Separate	3	2.73
	Single	38	34.54
	Widow/Widower	1	.009
	Total	110	100
What made you pursue graduate studies?	for personal development	9	8.11
	for professional growth	90	81.08
	for promotion	11	9.91
	Others,	1	.009
	Total	111	100

The data presented in Table 1 presents the profile of the graduates from the School of Graduate Studies at USL. A notable observation is the diversity in completed graduate programs, with the Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master in Public Administration (MPA) emerging as the predominant choices, comprising 19.1% and 24.3% of the graduates, respectively. This variation suggests a wide array of academic interests and career trajectories among the alumni. Examining the distribution across different years of graduation unveils a consistent engagement with graduate studies, with notable peaks in 2023 (25.0%) and 2018 (8.9%). This pattern indicates ongoing enrollment and reflects the relevance of the graduate programs offered by the university over the years. Furthermore, the gender distribution highlights a majority of female graduates (60.36%), emphasizing a noteworthy gender diversity within the School of Graduate Studies. While strides have been made toward gender balance, continued efforts to encourage diversity in academic pursuits are essential.

Civil status details indicate that a significant proportion of graduates are married (61.82%), shedding light on the diverse life situations of the alumni. Understanding the

civil status of graduates provides context to their academic and professional journeys, offering valuable insights for program adjustments or support services that may benefit individuals in different life stages. An intriguing aspect is the overwhelming majority of graduates pursuing graduate studies for professional growth (81.08%). This underscores a strong connection between academic pursuits and career development, aligning with the university's commitment to preparing graduates for success in the workforce. The smaller percentages indicating motivations for personal development (8.11%) or promotion (9.91%) offer additional dimensions to individuals' varied reasons to pursue advanced degrees.

Table 2. Employment Profile of Graduates of the School of Graduate Studies of University of Saint Louis

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Are you employed	Employed	109	97.32
	Not employed	3	2.68
	Total	112	100
Present Employment Status	Contractual	12	.12
	Permanent	95	95.00
	Self Employed	1	.01
	Others	2	.02
	Total	100	100
Place of Work	Abroad	7	6.42
	Local	102	93.57
	Total	109	100
Job Before Taking Graduate Studies	Managerial or Supervisory	7	7.14
	Technical	24	24.49
	Rank and File	53	54.08
	Self Employed	4	4.08
	Others, please specify	10	10.20
	Total	98	100
Job Level After Completion of the Graduate Studies	Managerial or Supervisory	40	36.04
	Technical	26	23.42
	Rank and File	38	34.23
	Self Employed	0	0
	Others, please specify	7	6.31
	Total	111	100

Table 2 provides a detailed insight into the employment profile of graduates from the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Saint Louis, shedding light on their current employment status, nature of their present employment, location of their workplaces, and evolution of their job roles before and after completing their graduate studies.

Firstly, the overwhelmingly positive response to the question of current employment status is noteworthy, with 97.32% of graduates reporting being employed. This high employment rate suggests that the majority of the graduates have successfully transitioned into the workforce, reflecting positively on the preparedness and relevance of the graduate programs offered by the university. In examining the nature of present employment, a substantial 95.00% of graduates hold permanent positions, indicating a high degree of stability in their current roles. The prevalence of contractual employment is relatively low at 0.12%, affirming the significance of permanent positions in the post-graduate landscape.

The geographical distribution of workplaces is predominantly local, with 93.57% of graduates employed within the country, while 6.42% work abroad. This international presence indicates the global mobility and competitiveness of the University of Saint Louis's graduates. Analyzing the job roles before undertaking graduate studies reveals a diverse employment background, with individuals in managerial or supervisory positions constituting 7.14%, technical roles at 24.49%, and a significant majority in rank and file positions at 54.08%. This diversity suggests that the graduate programs attract individuals from various professional backgrounds, fostering a mix of skill sets within the student body. A notable transition is evident in the job levels post-graduation, where 36.04% of graduates have moved into managerial or supervisory roles, showcasing career advancement. Technical roles constitute 23.42%, and 34.23% remain in rank and file positions. This distribution underscores the impact of graduate studies on career progression, with a substantial number of graduates ascending to higher levels of responsibility.

Table 3. School-related Factors that are relevant in the graduate studies as assessed by Graduates of the School of Graduate Studies of University of Saint Louis

School-Related Factors	Frequency	Rank
Curriculum and Instruction	87	1
Faculty	71	4
School Resources	65	5
Practicum Experience	29	8
Academic Requirements	75	3
Research	81	2
Service Learning Programs	50	6
Extra-Curricular Activities (Graduate School day and Night, Socialization)	19	9
Curricular Activities (field trip, immersion)	30	7

Table 3 delves into the assessment of various school-related factors by graduates from the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Saint Louis, shedding light on their perceptions of the importance and impact of these factors on their graduate studies. The most prominent factor, according to the graduates, is the curriculum and instruction, with 87 respondents ranking it as the most relevant. This underscores the fundamental role that a well-structured and robust curriculum plays in shaping the educational experience. The university's success in designing and implementing a curriculum that resonates with the needs and expectations of the students is reflected in this high ranking.

Research emerges as the second most influential factor, with 81 respondents recognizing its significance. This emphasis on research highlights the importance placed on academic inquiry and the development of critical thinking skills within the graduate programs at USL. The acknowledgment of research as a key factor suggests a strong focus on fostering intellectual curiosity and scholarly exploration. Academic requirements secure the third position, with 75 graduates highlighting their importance. This finding underscores the significance of clear and well-communicated academic expectations, demonstrating the graduates' awareness of the value of structured and transparent academic requirements in facilitating their educational journeys.

Faculty members, although ranking fourth, remain a crucial factor, as indicated by 71 respondents. The role of faculty in providing guidance, mentorship, and expertise is evident, contributing significantly to the overall satisfaction and success of the graduates in their academic pursuits. School resources and practicum experience are rated fifth and eighth, respectively, emphasizing the importance of access to adequate resources and practical experiences in enriching the learning environment. Meanwhile, service learning programs and curricular activities are recognized as relevant, albeit ranking lower, suggesting that while they contribute to the overall educational experience, they may not be as pivotal as other factors in the graduates' assessment.

Table 4. Competencies acquired in the Graduate Studies that contributed to the achievement of their work goals as assessed by Graduates of the School of Graduate Studies of University of Saint Louis

School-Related Factors	Frequency	Rank
Research Skills	89	1
Leadership Skills	77	7
Communication Skills	88	2
Collaboration Skills	78	8
Critical Skills	81	6
Mentoring Skills	62	9
Management Skills	84	4
Work Ethics	84	4
Team Work	84	4

Table 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the competencies acquired during graduate studies that graduates from the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Saint Louis perceive as contributing significantly to the achievement of their work goals. The results offer valuable insights into the skills and abilities cultivated through the graduate programs, shedding light on their relevance to professional success. Research skills emerge as the most impactful competency, securing the top position with 89 respondents recognizing its significance. This underscores the emphasis placed on research within the graduate programs, indicating that graduates attribute a high level of importance to the ability to conduct independent research and apply critical thinking skills in a professional context.

Communication skills follow closely in the ranking, with 88 respondents acknowledging their contribution to the achievement of work goals. Effective communication is a cornerstone in professional settings, and the recognition of its importance by the graduates suggests that the university's focus on fostering strong communication skills has positively impacted their professional journeys. Management skills, work ethic, and teamwork share the fourth position, with 84 respondents recognizing their significance. This triad of competencies underscores the holistic approach to professional development within the graduate programs. Graduates attribute their ability to manage tasks, maintain a strong work ethic, and collaborate effectively within a team as instrumental in achieving their work goals.

Critical skills and leadership skills occupy the sixth and seventh positions, respectively, with 81 and 77 respondents acknowledging their impact. These competencies speak to the graduates' ability to analyze situations critically and to assume leadership roles, further emphasizing the multifaceted skill set developed during their graduate studies. Collaboration skills and mentoring skills rank eighth and ninth, indicating a slightly lower perceived impact on work goals. However, the recognition of collaboration and mentoring as valuable competencies suggests that graduates still find these skills beneficial in specific professional contexts.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive exploration of the profile, employment status, school-related factors, and competencies acquired by graduates from the School of Graduate Studies and Continuing Professional Development at the University of Saint Louis. The findings reveal a diverse cohort of graduates with varied academic interests and career trajectories, reflected in the range of completed graduate programs. The study further highlights a consistent engagement with graduate studies over the years, with a notable majority of female graduates showcasing a commitment to gender diversity. The high employment rate

and stability in permanent positions affirm the successful transition of graduates into the workforce, reflecting positively on the university's preparedness and relevance. In terms of school-related factors, the graduates attribute particular significance to curriculum and instruction, research, and academic requirements. Faculty members play a crucial role in guiding and mentoring students, contributing significantly to the overall satisfaction and success of the graduates. While resources and practical experiences also contribute to the learning environment, they rank slightly lower in perceived relevance. The competencies acquired during graduate studies that graduates believe contributed to the achievement of their work goals include research skills, communication skills, management skills, work ethic, and teamwork. These findings underscore the holistic approach to professional development within the graduate programs, emphasizing the importance of a multifaceted skill set for success in the workforce.

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