



EMPLOYABILITY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The employability of university graduates is a concern in higher education as labor markets change more and more rapidly. This study assessed the employment status of BA graduates for the past five years from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2015-2016 and the skills and competencies acquired in the University with the competencies desired in the industry. The results of a survey from 873 Business Administration graduates of the University of Saint Louis indicate that majority are employed on a permanent status and able to get employed for an average of 4 months after graduation and are working in industries where their course or expertise are directly aligned. The survey revealed that communication skills, human relation skills and decision making skills are the soft skills/competencies that they learned in college and are useful in their present job. Meanwhile, among the Marketing graduates, advertising skills, marketing plan preparation and service/ product presentation skills are the top 3 learned hard skills in the school while among the Finance and Financial Management graduates, their top 3 were financial report preparation, cash management and technical analysis. Furthermore, majority of both the soft and hard skills learned in college were also valuable and suitable in their industries. It is therefore imperative that academic institutions should develop the skills and competencies among the students in order to match the demands and needs of the industry and to increase the graduates' likelihood of desired employability while improving the strengths of the university towards its curriculum, instruction, school services, physical plant facilities, faculty, administration and affiliation/linkages.

Keywords: Employability, Skills/ Competencies, BA Graduates

INTRODUCTION

Graduates are faced with the challenge of acquiring employment right after graduation. It is paramount that they should have gained the best knowledge and skills in their field of specialization before plunging into any workplace of their choice. A school plays a very important role in providing higher education courses to students who will eventually become graduates with full competence in their fields of study (Ballon, 2007). To keep pace with global competition, fresh graduates need to adapt to the new business environment and workplace demands. The key element to enable graduates to keep up with those demands seems to be the employability skills and traits that are imparted during tertiary education. It has also become a common belief in industry that higher education institutions should equip graduates with the proper skills necessary to achieve success in the workplace (Robinson & Garton, 2007).

A school should offer higher education courses that will provide students with the necessary tools which will enable them to develop their employability skills heighten their awareness of these skills and improve their ability to articulate them. These acquired skills must be honed throughout one's working life. Putting into practice not only in job search and interviews but also in personal development planning and in making the most of work experience opportunities (Debono, Debono & Caruana, 2005). Moreover, career and employability skills should be taught in schools, since many students leave education without the requisite skills to succeed in the adult work world (Zinser 2003). Furthermore, it should be emphasized that graduates should leave higher education better in many ways than when they enter it (Washer, 2007). This improvement should be attributable to the undergraduate curriculum which is important to equip them with skills they can use to 'sell themselves' to employers (Latisha & Surina, 2010). Providing students with the opportunities to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes is obviously important, but so too is providing opportunities for reflection on and evaluation of the learning experiences that have already taken place. Without these opportunities, a student is unlikely to give full consideration to how far they have come in developing their employability and what they may need to do in order to develop it further (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

The Commission for Higher Education (CHED) survey indicates that Business Administration course is an oversubscribed course as there are 724,215 enrollees of the course in 2009-2010 from a total of 2,770,965 enrollees in all disciplines. According to CMO No.39 s2006, graduates of a BSBA program should be able to: convey ideas clearly both oral and written in English, prepare, analyze, and evaluate reports, proposals and concept papers, demonstrate the values of fairness, transparency, accountability, hard work, honesty, patience, diligence, innovativeness and risk taking, apply the principles of the different forms of communication, develop the ability to access, retrieve and disseminate information using it, perform quality work, understand the concepts and principles of good interpersonal relations, develop a wholesome personality, participate actively in business associations and comply with their policies and obligations, demonstrate leadership qualities, civic-mindedness and responsible citizenship, conduct environmental scanning, conduct feasibility study and other business research/plan, explain the concepts, approaches, and techniques of environmental conservation, and know and understand the country's national development thrusts, concerns and socio-economic indicators.

Many jobs require some sort of skills and experience. These skills may not be very advanced or can be acquired for a long period of time, but these normally are required by employers or are necessary on a type of work. Lack of recent work experience, out-of-date skills, growing lack of confidence, personal or behavioral problems may be reasons for not being employed. Other organizations find it safer to employ those who had previous employment or have been out of work for a short period of time. Shafie & Nayan (2010) mentioned that employers today are concerned about finding good workers who not only have basic academic skills like reading, writing, science, mathematics, oral communication and listening, but also higher order thinking skills like learning, reasoning, thinking creatively, decision making and problem solving. Besides, they are also looking for employees that have personal qualities that among all include responsibility, self-confidence, self-control, social skill, honest, have integrity, adaptable and flexible, team spirit, punctual and efficient, self-directed, good work attitude, well-groomed, cooperative, self-motivated and self-management. However, most of our graduates are not aware of

this current phenomenon whereby they sometimes don't see the connection on what they do in class with the real job world that they will venture into later.

It is in this light that this study is undertaken to determine the status of employability of Business Administration graduates of the University of Saint Louis (USL). This study also aimed to identify the skills or competencies useful in their present job.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study was to determine the employability of graduates of Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2015-2016. Specifically, it addresses the following objectives:

1. To determine the employment status of Business Administration graduates
2. To identify the soft and hard skills useful in their present employment
3. To assess the Business Administration program of USL in relation to the hard and soft skills acquired in the University with the competencies needed by the industry
4. To identify the areas for further improvement of the program and the University

Significance of the Study

This study attempts to add knowledge about the need to use tracer study for the enhancement of quality course programs offered in HEIs to be able to respond to the needs of globalization. Findings of the study will assist policy planners, educators and decision makers of the School of Business Administration and Accountancy and the University of Saint Louis in the enrichment of curriculum and improvement of the university in general. Further, it provides knowledge to students on what specific skills and competencies to develop and enhance for greater chance of employability.

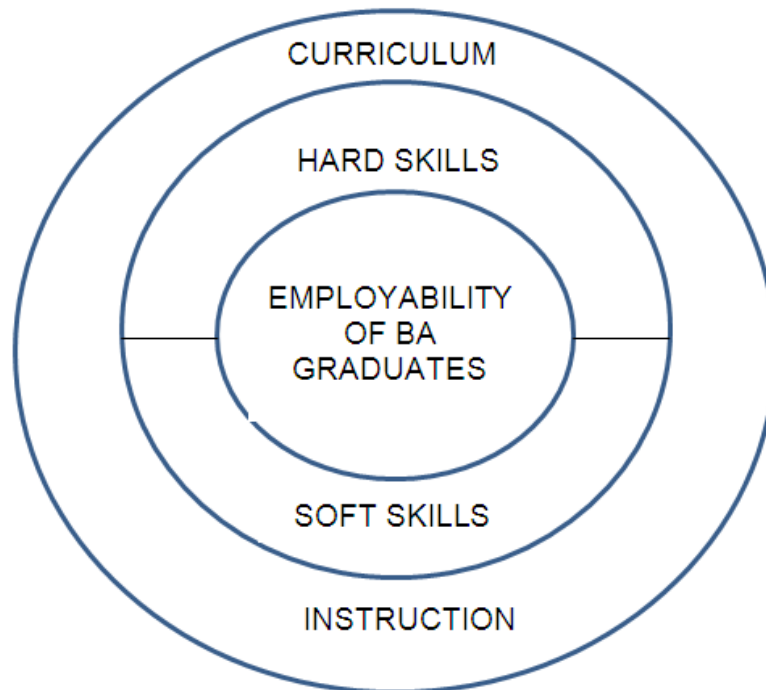


Figure 1. Research Paradigm

The paradigm shows that the Business Administration graduates are provided with responsive curriculum and quality instruction to acquire the required skills and competencies needed by the industry.

METHODS

The study used the descriptive survey method of research. The respondents were the graduates of Business Administration program from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2015-2016. A total of 873 (72.69%) graduates within the five-year period were traced using the Tracer Survey questionnaire sent to graduates through e-mail, social network and through the students of the university who are friends and relatives of the graduates. The survey questionnaire was also uploaded in the school's website and social network for the graduates to conveniently answer specially those working outside Tuguegarao and abroad. The questionnaire includes the employment status of graduates and the skills and competencies acquired in school in terms of soft and hard skills. It also includes recommendations and suggestions to further improve the Business Administration program of the university. The questionnaire was validated by the Institutional Research and Publication Office (IRPO) before it was distributed to the graduates.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and ranks were used to analyze data.

Table 1. Distribution of BA Graduates Traced

Year	No. of Graduates	No. of Traced Graduates	Percentage of Traced Graduates
2012	201	148	73.63
2013	281	148	52.67
2014	264	210	79.55
2015	213	175	82.16
2016	242	192	79.34
Total	1,201	873	72.69

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study.

Table 2. Status of Employment of Graduates in terms of Present Occupation

Employment Status		Frequency	Percentage
Employed	Managerial	22	2.52
	Non-Managerial	747	85.56
Self-Employed		22	2.52
Not Employed		55	6.30
Never Employed		27	3.09
Present	Regular or Permanent	554	71.22

Employment Status	Temporary/ Probationary	48	6.43
	Casual/ Contractual	167	22.36
Place of Work	Local	727	94.54
	Abroad	42	5.46

The table reveals that majority (85.58%) of the graduates are employed. Only 3.09% (27) of the graduates were never employed. Most of them are now having regular or permanent status and are working locally. Few of the graduates are self-employed or who are managing their own business or family business. There are about 12% who are not employed because they are pursuing post-graduate studies and law school while some did not really look for a job due to family concern and other reasons.

Table 3. Waiting Time of Graduates to Get Employed

Length of time to get employed	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 3 months	491	63.85
3 – 6 months	159	20.68
7– 9 months	60	7.80
More than 9 months	59	7.67
Average waiting time	4 months	

As gleaned in the table, about 64% of the graduates traced were able to get a job within 1-3 months after graduation while there are very few who got employed for more than 9 months of waiting. On the average, it took 4 months waiting time before the graduates was called for job, this implies that BA graduates can easily land in a job despite having few/limited course-related employment opportunities.

Table 4. Nature of Job

Nature of Job	Frequency	Percentage
Accounting	197	25.62
Administrative/Aide/Assistant	137	17.82
Finance	86	11.18
Marketing	70	9.10
Sales	56	7.28
Banking	54	7.02
Government Employee	51	6.63
Auditing	26	3.3
Analysts	19	2.47
Teaching	19	2.47
Police Officer	17	2.21
Manufacturing/Production	9	1.17
Information Technology	9	1.17
Consultant	8	1.04

Human Resource	5	0.65
Overseas Filipino Worker	3	0.39
Fire Officer	3	0.39

The table reveals that majority of the graduates are working as accounting staff (e.g. cashiers, bookkeeper, accounting clerk, accounts payable analysts, etc.) and administrative aide/assistant. There are also few of the graduates who are teachers, police officers, fire officers and OFW. It can be noticed that most of the graduates are currently under private companies to which their expertise are directly aligned (e.g. accounting staff, finance staff, auditing staff, sales and marketing staff, etc.) while almost 7% of the graduates works in the government under casual status or job order status.

Table 5. Number of Years in the Present job

Number of Years in the Present Job	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	374	48.63
1-2 years	247	32.12
3-4 years	135	17.56
More than 4 years	13	1.69

As revealed from the table, almost half of the respondents are just new to their job as they have been in the position for less than a year. Only few have stayed in their jobs for 1-4 years and very few are in their jobs for more than 4 years. This is so because this tracer study is conducted among the graduates of the university from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2015-2016 which is just 5 years ago and while some of the traced graduates switch one job from the other.

Table 6. Soft Skills/ Competencies Learned in College and Useful in Present Job

Soft Skills/Competencies	Learned in College		Useful in Present Job	
	frequency	rank	frequency	Rank
Communication Skills	618	1st	575	1st
Analytical Skills	346	10 th	314	9 th
Human Relation Skills	555	2nd	512	2nd
Commitment to Work	332	11 th	305	10 th
Problem-Solving Skills	519	4 th	433	5 th
Decision Making Skills	535	3rd	467	3rd
Critical thinking skills	452	7 th	416	6 th
Creative thinking skills	469	6 th	391	8 th
Supervisory skills	267	15 th	241	15 th
Self-directed learning	289	13 th	253	14 th
Teamwork	421	8 th	408	7 th
Work Ethics	354	9 th	297	11 th
Flexibility	287	14 th	282	12 th
Resource Management	299	12 th	257	13 th

Skills				
Computer skills	501	5 th	450	4 th
Others	7	16 th	5	16 th

The table discloses the soft skills learned in college and are useful in the present job of graduates. It shows that the top 3 soft skills learned in college are communication skills, human relation skills and decision making skills. The same skills are found to be useful in the present job of the graduates. This implies that BA graduates are honed both in oral and written communication skills. Moreover, the students abide with Christian values that affected their human relations. Meanwhile, the decision making skills of the graduates was developed because of the assessment tools used in their major subjects like case analysis, case presentation, argumentations, debate session and others.

Table 7. Skills/ Competencies in Marketing that are Useful in Present Job

Hard Skills	Learned in College		Useful in Job	
	frequency	Rank	frequency	Rank
Product proposal presentation	37	8 th	33	3rd
Service/ product presentation skills	42	3rd	31	5 th
Product innovation	33	10 th	23	9 th
SWOT analysis	38	6 th	32	4 th
Sales report preparation	39	5 th	35	2nd
Marketing analysis	40	4 th	25	8 th
Marketing plan preparation	46	2nd	30	6 th
Market segmentation	38	6 th	28	7 th
Advertising skills	49	1st	41	1st
Event management	34	9 th	20	10 th
Other skills	1	11 th	2	11 th

As seen from the table, the top three hard skills learned in school by Marketing graduates are advertising skills, marketing plan preparation and service/ product presentation skills whereas the top three hard skills found to be useful to the present job of graduates are advertising skills, sales report preparation and product proposal presentation. This shows that the University prepares its Marketing graduates to be well prepared and ever ready to work in the industry. That through the curriculum and assessment tools in their major subjects, their skills in making advertisements like TV ads, print ads, radio ads, their skills in presenting product proposals that are creative/innovative and their skills on preparing both marketing plan and sales report are properly ensured by their subject teachers with the proper support of the department and the University as a whole.

Table 8. Skills in Finance/ Financial Management that are Useful in Present Job

Hard Skills	Learned in College		Useful in Job	
	Frequency	Rank	Frequency	Rank
Financial report preparation	375	1st	321	1st
Financial analysis	274	7 th	200	6 th
Aging of receivables	225	11 th	163	9 th
SWOT analysis	283	6 th	224	4 th
Credit policies formulation	241	8 th	180	7 th
Counterfeit money detection	294	5 th	162	10 th
Cash management	334	2nd	261	2nd
Technical analysis	303	3rd	217	5 th
Banking systems and processes	295	4 th	234	3rd
Economic analysis	232	9 th	175	8 th
Bond valuation	202	12 th	132	12 th
Stock valuation	228	10 th	151	11 th
Other skills	18	13 th	9	13 th

As gleaned from the table, the top three hard skills learned in school by Finance and Financial Management graduates are financial report preparation, cash management and technical analysis while the hard skills that are useful in the present job of the graduates are financial report preparation, cash management and banking systems and processes. The results imply that Finance and Financial Management graduates are properly equipped with the hard skills needed in their respective jobs/industry. Given their major subjects, students are well trained of preparing financial reports and proper handling/management of cash. Though comes 4th as a skill learned in college and 3rd to be useful in the job, Financial Management and Finance graduates are well taught of the different banking systems and process because some graduates were exposed to the different banks during their on-the-job training and classroom simulations.

Table 9. Recommendations for University Improvement

Recommendations	Frequency	Rank
Curriculum	76	1st
Instruction	49	2nd
Physical plant Facilities	25	4 th
School Services	32	3rd
Faculty	14	5 th
Affiliation/ Linkages	5	7 th
Administration	12	6 th

The table reveals that the top three areas recommended for further improvement in the University are its curriculum, instruction and school services. For its curriculum, the graduates recommend that there should be an inclusion of Systems Applications and Products, provision of more seminars for the students to be exposed to different workshops that will enhance their skills and the inclusion of first year to fourth year

students to the seminars that are to be held outside the school. Also, there should be a separate semester for OJT programs in order for the students to be well prepared and trained in the work environment and if possible, OJT should be conducted outside Tuguegarao for BA students for better exposure. For the instruction, it is recommended that the faculty should improve their discipline in communicating, faculty should enhance the skills of the students in their respective fields in a manner that the teacher should not focus on the theoretical aspects and they should be trained more for enhanced computer skills especially in MS office. It is also recommended that for school services, the university should provide internet connection or additional computer laboratory for students to work, that the enrolment system should be fast and the enrolment procedures should be easy to follow or understand, there should be no noon-break policy during the payment periods during exams, and also, there should be a wider library because the space is not enough especially during exam for the students to review and the library should have more books if possible.

On the other areas, for physical plant, it is recommended that the school should have a more developed and improved school facilities (e.g., projectors, computer sets, fans, chairs, etc.) and the classrooms should be airconditioned. For the faculty, the university should always hire the best educators/faculties, should empower and encourage continuous professional development of the instructors and the faculty should deliver lectures with new techniques and the school should invite professionals/experts to deliver lectures. For affiliation/linkages, the university should build stronger reputation, should collaborate with other institutions and should develop student ties/affiliates outside the school. And lastly, for the administration, it is recommended that administrators should be student-friendly, open to suggestions and ideas for improvement.

DISCUSSION

Results of the study revealed that majority of the graduates of Business Administration program are employed. Most of them hold regular or permanent status and are working locally or in the Philippines. Few of the graduates are self-employed. About 12% of the graduates are not employed for reasons of advance or further study, did not look for a job, family concern and or decided not to find a job. However, some are unemployed because they prefer to advance or further their study. In addition, they did not look for a job because of family concern. This affirms the result of the study conducted in PUP (2005) that graduates were not employed because of family concern. It also showed that majority of the graduates are applying their chosen courses due to the nature of job they are currently in while there are few of them who are now under managerial/supervisory positions. Meanwhile, there is about 64% of the traced graduates who were able to get hired for within 1-3 months of waiting but none of the graduates were immediately got employed for less than a month of waiting. And there are very few who got a job for more than 9 months after they graduated. This is consonance to the findings that graduates waiting time ranged from less than a month to 1-6 months (Rocaberte, 2016; Ballon, 2007). Prevalent reasons for graduates' unemployment was "no job opportunity" & "lack of knowledge" (Rocaberte, 2016).

Graduates found that the top three soft skills/competencies learned in college and are useful in the present job are communication skills, human relation skills and decision making skills. The skills or competencies learned are already manifested among the students as they play their respective functions or tasks in their workplace which is likely

the same skills required in their jobs. This confirms the results of the study of Singh (2008) that the competencies learned in college that are found very useful were communications skills, human relations skills, computer skills, critical thinking skills and problem solving skills. Graduates' employability is influenced by such skills/ competencies. Problem solving, functioning well in stressful situations, ability to work independently and maintaining a positive attitude were the highly rated skills according to importance. In relation, the most important generic competency required by the graduates was the acquisition of high levels of written communication skills. Whilst the majority of the graduates felt their education had equipped them with transferable written skills, this was not the case when discussing oral presentation skills. Although many of the graduates felt that their education had not provided them with the necessary level of oral communication skills required in the work environment, many felt that their university experiences of group-work had provided them with vital team-working skills (Andrews, 2008). While, communication skills, human relations, and information technology skills were found to be the top three competencies found to be the most useful to graduates in order to land on their first job (Ballon, 2007).

Among the Marketing graduates, advertising skills, marketing plan preparation and service/ product presentation skills are the top three hard skills that they learned while advertising skills, sales report preparation and product proposal presentation are found to be useful skills in their present job. Given the present curriculum in the University, it is a status quo that advertising skills and service/product presentation skills are well taught of. However, it is important to note that currently, there is no separate subject that is offered in the curriculum that solely focused on sales report/product proposal presentation. These particular skills are only demonstrated in some assessment tools among the existing major subjects in the curriculum.

Meanwhile, Financial Management and Finance graduates expressed that the hard skills on financial report presentation and cash management are both learned in school and are useful in their present job. It is evident that in the curriculum of Financial Management course, subjects like Financial Analysis and Reporting, Financial Management and Strategic Financial Management that the skills mentioned were being emphasized. Also, skill on banking systems and processes was implied to be found useful in the banking industry and this particular skill is developed among students in the University especially under their subjects on Bank Management, Bank and Non-Bank and Financial Management. However, in the 2004/2007/2014 curriculum, there is now an only one subject where this skill is taught and that is Bank and Nonbank Management.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that majority of the BA graduates from SY 2011-2012 to SY 2015-2016 are employed and are highly employable since they got employed for less than a year. Most of them are now permanent or regular in their respective jobs. Both Marketing and Financial Management/Finance graduates were able to learn and develop the hard skills and soft skills/competencies needed or required by the industry.

It can be further concluded that through the years, USL were able to produce BA graduates that are highly competent and professionally ready to work in their respective industries because they were holistically developed while they are in the University.

Moreover, the BA graduates were able to acquire the highly necessary skills and competencies which made them hired or employed on a regular/permanent basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employability of graduates is highly dependent on qualifications sought by the labor market. Graduates should possess communication skills, human relation skills, computer skills and ability to work under pressure to have greater chance of being employed. Academic institutions therefore should develop these skills to their students to increase likelihood of desired employability.

With all the findings of the study, it is recommended that University should review the recommendations shared by the BA graduates. Among these recommendations that needs to be considered are: the need to review the curriculum particularly on offering major subjects that shall focus on the enhancement of both hard and soft skills/competencies that are expected among the graduates, the possibility of returning the Bank Management subject under the Business Administration major in Financial Management, the exposure of the BA students to a more realistic on-the-job training within and outside the province, the necessity to improve facilities of the university, the hiring of well-experienced and trained professors to develop more the skills and knowledge of the students to match the needs of the industry, the conduct/provision of seminars/trainings to complement the students' theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom in a more realistic setting/environment.

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