

Socio-Demographic Profile and Employment Status of Bicol University College of Arts and Letters Graduates (2008-2010)

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Abstract

A pressing concern in higher education is the employability of graduates. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are turning out 465,000 graduates every year on the average. Aside from the issue on the absorptive capacity of the labor market based on its required knowledge, skills, attitude and values, the quality of graduates is also an issue. The challenge is for HEIs to determine the relevance of curricular programs and their potential job marketability. Research-based approaches and strategies should be established to provide students a set of achievements, skills, understanding, and personal attributes that make them more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy. This tracer study of the Bicol University College of Arts and Letters assessed how well the college has trained its graduates for life in the workplace. It found that majority of the graduates are gainfully employed in related workplaces. Most of them got their first job within one month to less than three years after graduation and stayed in their first job within one month to less than three years. Compensation benefits such as salaries and other non-monetary benefits are the factors that made the graduates stay or leave their first job. Almost all competencies learned by the graduates were found very helpful and relevant to their jobs. Feedback and recommendations were also gained from both the graduates and the employers in order to improve the employability of the graduates. Findings indicate a need to revisit the curricular programs in order to address those issues.

Keywords: *Curricula, Employability, Enhancement, Policy, Recommendations*

Introduction

One concern arising amidst higher education advances is the employability of graduates. The higher education institutions are turning out 465,000 graduates every year on the average (CHED Statistics, 2016) but not everybody is given the opportunity to work within the expected period of time for them to be employed. Aside from the issue of the absorptive capacity of the labor market based on its required knowledge, skills, attitude, and values, the quality of graduates is also an issue. The challenge therefore lies not only in the government and in the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). It is also the concern of HEIs like Bicol University (BU) to define their niche as well as to determine the relevance of their curricular programs and their potential job marketability. Research-based approaches and strategies have to be established to provide students set of achievements, skills, understanding and personal attributes that

would make them more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

Bicol University is one of the 22 leading universities in the country as identified by the CHED. It is the biggest university in the Bicol region in terms of enrolment as it captures 20% of the total enrolment in the tertiary and advance higher education in the region. Consequently, BU takes the lead in providing for the economic, social and human capital development of the region and its neighbouring regions. Its vision of becoming a world-class university calls for a paradigm shift in carrying out its mandates along instruction, research and extension.

The Bicol University College of Arts and Letters (BUCAL) is one of the 16 degree-granting units of the university offering five programs namely: AB English, AB Communication, AB Journalism, AB Speech and Theater Arts and the newest program which is only on

its 6th year of operation, the AB Broadcasting. BUCAL has produced many graduates who are now successful in their respective fields. However, as years go by the requirements of the industry also change. Therefore, it is imperative for the university to continuously strive to improve its curricular offerings to ensure that there is sustained and wide employability of its graduates. One of the tests of how a university is able to contribute to the creation of professionals who comprise the economic workforce whether local, national or global is through a tracer study, where an institution looks into the employability of its graduates emphasizing not only whether the graduates are employed but more so getting feedback from their employers as regard their job performance in their respective work. This is to assess the relevance of the curricular offerings to the actual work of the graduates. Moreover, Tan and French-Arnold (2012) discussed the responsibility of the HEIs in enhancing the employability and competitiveness of the graduates to fill the increasing demands of labor force. They further elaborated that the HEIs' contribution to economic progress is manifested in generating labor force, generating skilled individuals, and improving the new information system. Thus, it is now a global trend that HEIs should address the call of employability of their graduates - making employability as an indicator of the educational system's efficiency.

The research aimed to identify the current and potential human resource capacities of BUCAL graduates in the undergraduate degree programs. Specifically, it aimed to (1) describe the socio-demographic profile of the BUCAL graduates from SY 2007-2008 to 2009-2010, (2) determine their employment status and the factors affecting their employment; and (3) identify career and/or curriculum enhancement measures and policies to enhance employability of BUCAL graduates.

The research is anchored on the concept of human capital which recognizes that not all labor is equal and that the quality of employees can be improved by investing in them. The education, experience and abilities of an employee have an economic value for employers and for the economy as a whole. According to the Center for the Study of Living Standards, the concept of human capital can be described as the capabilities, both innate or accumulated, embodied in the working age population that allow it to work productively with other forms of capital to sustain economic production (Sharpe, 2001). The research further identified the employment status of the graduates of BUCAL and looked into the factors affecting the employment to come up with Career or Curriculum Enhancement

Measures and Policy Recommendations to ensure responsiveness of the curricular offerings.

Materials and Methods

Study Locale

Alumni included in this research are graduates of Bicol University College of Arts and Letters (BUCAL). The college is located at Bicol University Main Campus in Legazpi City, Philippines and is one of the 16 colleges and units of the university. The college offers 5 programs: AB English, AB Communication, AB Journalism, AB Speech and Theater Arts and AB Broadcasting. As a new program, AB Broadcasting was excluded from this tracer research.

Data Gathered

Data gathered included the socio-demographic profile and employment status of the graduates. The socio-demographic profile of the graduates refers to the respondents' sex, civil status, educational attainment, parents' occupational background, average family size and average family income. Employment status includes the current work/occupation of the graduates, relevance of competencies learned in BUCAL to their jobs as perceived by the graduates, length of job search period after graduation of the graduates, nature/sector of the first job after graduation, initial gross monthly income on the first job after graduation, and the length of time the graduates stayed on their first job.

Data Privacy and Analysis

All data gathered in this research were treated confidential and no association was made to a specific individual in compliance with data privacy regulations. Frequency count, weighted mean, percentage, and ranking were used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Profile of the BUCAL Graduates (2008-2010)

Based on the data gathered, there is a predominance of women graduates in BUCAL. There are 184 or 86% females while only 30 or 14% were males (Table 1). This shows that courses offered at BUCAL are more

Table 1. Proportion of Respondents by Gender and Civil Status

Proportion	by Gender		Total	by Civil Status		Total
	Male	Female		Single	Married	
Number of Actual graduates	179 (25%)	539 (75%)	718	718(100%)	0 (0.00%)	718
No. of Respondents	30 (14%)	184(86%)	214 (30%)	163(76%)	51(24%)	214

Table 2. Respondents' Educational Background

Year Graduated	Degree								Total	
	AB English		AB Journ		AB Comm.		AB STA		Res	%
	AG	Res	AG	Res	AG	Res	AG	Res		
2008	81	22 (27%)	38	13 (34%)	81	17 (21%)	32	12 (38%)	64	30%
2009	87	22 (25%)	75	22 (29%)	70	18 (26%)	54	14 (26%)	76	36%
2010	62	15 (24%)	50	23 (46%)	60	25 (42%)	28	11 (39%)	74	34%
Total	230	59 (26%)	221	58 (26%)	211	60 (28%)	114	37 (32%)	214	100%

Legend: AG – Actual number of graduates; Res - Respondents

attractive to females than males. This is also consistent with the data from the record of the college registrar which indicates that out of the 699 graduates of the three batches covered by this study, only 24% are males while 76% are females.

Most of the graduate-respondents are single with a total of 163 or 76% while 51 or 24% are married. The ages of the respondents range between 23-25 years old. This age bracket is believed to be the priming age of those who are establishing security of tenure in their work. They would want first to focus on their work in order to establish their tenure in their respective work before they get married and build their own families.

In terms of educational background, the data (Table 2) showed that 59 or 26% of the respondents are AB English graduates; 58 or 26% are BCA major in Journalism graduates; 60 or 28% are BCA manor in Audio Visual Communication (AVC) graduates and 37 or 32 % are BCA major in Speech and Theater Arts graduates. Of the 214 total respondents 64 or 30% come from Batch 2007-2008; 76 or 36% come from Batch 2008-2009; and 74 or 34% come from batch 2009-2010.

With regards to parents' occupational classification, 48 or 22% of the fathers of the respondents are farmers, forest workers, and fishermen; there are 35 or 16% fathers who are employed in the education sector either as teacher or non-teaching personnel; however, it can

also be noted that there are 30 or 14% of the fathers who are not employed. In terms of mothers' occupational classification, there are 43 or 20% of the mothers are not employed, 40 or 19% are employed under education sector either as teachers or non-teaching personnel, while 30 or 14% of the mothers are employed under Health and Social Work sector.

In terms of respondents' average household size, the data revealed that 71 or 33% of the respondents has an average household size of 3 to 4 members, 62 or 29%

Table 3. Respondents' Monthly Family Income

Monthly Family Income	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 5,000	6	3%
5,000-10,000	23	11%
10,001-15,000	37	17%
15,001-20,000	40	19%
20,001-25,000	42	20%
25,001-30,000	29	13%
30,001-35,0000	20	9%
No Response	17	8%
Total	214	100%

Table 4. Employment Status of BUCAL Graduates

Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Employed (temporary/casual/contractual)	88	41%
Employed (regular/permanent)	84	39%
Self-employed	27	13%
Unemployed	13	6%
No Response	2	1%
Total	214	100%

of the respondents has 5 to 6 average household size, 41 or 19% has an average household size of 7-8 members, 25 or 12% of the respondents has a household size of 1-2 members, while 15 or 7% of the respondents has a household size of more than 8 members.

It can be noted that 42 or 20% of the respondents have an average family income of 20,001-25,000. There are six (6) respondents who revealed that their average family income is less than 5,000. Per verification through an interview with these respondents they revealed that they are among those whose jobs are not permanent yet and whose schedule of work are by schedule such as tutoring for 3 hours in a week, working as cashier in private stores and in some malls in the region.

Employment Status of BUCAL Graduates 2008-2010

There is 93% employment rate among graduates of BUCAL (Table 4). Sixty-six or 31% of the respondents are currently employed in offices such as Media specifically on Television and Radio, Public Relations and Customer Service, and Call Center Agents (Table 5). Thirty-two or 15% were employed as Officials of Government like Municipal or City Government Officials, Corporate Executive, Manager and Supervisor. There were 25 or 12% who were employed as Classroom Secondary Teachers, College Instructors, and On-line Tutors. Some 20 or 9% were employed at the Health and Social Work Department. Other occupations were graduates

Table 5. Current Occupation of BUCAL Graduates

Current Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Official of Government and official interest organization, Corporate Executive, Manager, Managing Proprietor, Supervisor	32	15%
Military, Police Force	4	2%
Technicians and Associate Professional	17	8%
Clerk (Secretary, Administrative Assistant)	19	9%
Education (Online Tutor, Classroom Teacher, Staff	25	12%
Health and Social Worker	20	9%
Other Community and Personal Services Activities (NGO Community Organizers)	16	7%
Not Employed	13	6%
Others (Media, Public Relations, Customer Service, Call Center Agents)	66	31%
No Answer	2	1%
Total	214	100%

of BUCAL are employed are Clerk, Technicians/ Associate Professional, Community organizing, and Military/Police Force.

Thirty-six or 17% of the graduates were hired 7 to 11 months after their graduation, 35 or 16% were hired less than a month after graduation. But there were 17 or 8% who said they were employed 3-4 years after graduation for reasons personal to them, some chose not to work yet to help in family business, some opt to continue their studies like taking up law school, graduate studies and additional training. Most of the graduates as represented by 44 or 21% stayed in their first jobs for 7 to 11 months, 42 or 20% stayed on their first jobs for 1 to 6 months only and there were 29 or 13 % who stayed on their first jobs for less than a month for reasons related to salary and benefits, work challenge, professional and personal development. Most of the graduates' first job sectors were in Media, Private and Public relations, Customer Service as revealed by 60 or 28%, 27 or 13% were first employed at Local Government Units as administrative assistants or secretary.

Seventy-two or 34% of the graduates have initial gross monthly income on their first job after college which is ranging from 10,001-15,000 while there were 15 or 7% who have initial gross monthly income on their first job which was less than 5,000. The jobs under this wage scale per verification of the researcher with the graduates were those jobs which do not require full time work like kid/pupil tutoring, volunteer work in some non-government organizations.

Factors Affecting Employment of BUCAL Graduates

The graduates and their employers provided feedback and suggestions on how the curricular programs may be enhanced to also improve the employability of the graduates. These were validated by the researcher through interviews with the respondents both the graduates and the employers.

Table 6 shows the employers' feedback on the importance of the skills and qualities of the graduates and the level of satisfaction by the employers on the job performance of the graduates. The findings are presented on a per program basis.

As revealed by the employers, the knowledge and understanding of the job by the graduates, the general qualities, general skills and specialized skills needed for successful performance of the job, were all noted to be very important qualifications in terms of ensuring

employability of the graduates. Likewise, the employers said that they are very satisfied with the performance of the graduates in terms of the skills and qualities mentioned. It was also a common response from both the graduate-respondents and employers that graduates who are more accomplished in terms of academic performance like graduating with honors and in terms of engagement in co-curricular or extra-curricular activities earned in college are more motivated and have better chances of employment. This came out in the interview with the employers mentioning that the graduates they hired were honor students and were active in co-curricular or extra-curricular activities during their college days as reflected in the resume of the graduates.

Based on the interview of the researcher with the employers, the following graduate skills and attributes are well valued by the employers: (a) good interpersonal and communication skills; (b) ability to use not only one's own initiative but also to follow instructions; (c) literacy and numeracy relevant to work; (d) ICT knowledge; (e) team working; (f) problem Solving; (g) self-management; (h) customer relations; (i) knowledge of people and cultures from other countries; and (j) leadership skills where necessary. This means that the university has to look into these competencies vis-à-vis the competencies of the different programs in order to bridge the gap between the course competencies and the industry required competencies to ensure employability of the graduates. Leadership and teamwork are reported to be topmost skills considered by employers (Olfindo & Belgica, 2017).

Graduate-respondents likewise revealed that there are some school-related factors that affect the graduates' chance of landing a job such as the school's accreditation in national and international levels by reputable accrediting bodies, school's networks or linkage with other institutions both in the local and international levels. These factors add confidence to the graduates as they present themselves to the employers. Most of the graduates said that the competencies gained from their programs were very helpful in their first, second or third jobs. Most of them were hired in media, private and public relations, and customer service.

Another significant factor that affects the employment of the graduates is the quality of guidance and career services within the institution. It is a student support that could be a great venue for preparing students with the rigors of the transition from university to employment. Graduates professed that they had little

Table 6. Employers' Feedback on the Performance of Graduates Per Program

Skill/Qualities	Level of Importance		Level of Satisfaction	
AB English				
Knowledge and Understanding	1.69	Very Important	1.85	Satisfied
General Qualities	1.61	Very Important	1.72	Very Satisfied
General Skills	1.69	Very Important	1.82	Satisfied
Specialized Skills	1.75	Very Important	2.08	Satisfied
BCA major in Journalism				
Knowledge and Understanding	1.67	Very Important	1.89	Satisfied
General Qualities	1.60	Very Important	1.76	Very Satisfied
General Skills	1.70	Very Important	1.82	Satisfied
Specialized Skills	1.77	Very Important	2.09	Satisfied
BCA major in Audio Visual Communication				
Knowledge and Understanding	1.68	Very Important	1.89	Satisfied
General Qualities	1.59	Very Important	1.75	Very Satisfied
General Skills	1.65	Very Important	1.82	Satisfied
Specialized Skills	1.78	Very Important	2.05	Satisfied
BCA major in Speech and Theater Arts				
Knowledge and Understanding	1.65	Very Important	1.85	Satisfied
General Qualities	1.60	Very Important	1.76	Very Satisfied
General Skills	1.68	Very Important	1.82	Satisfied
Specialized Skills	1.74	Very Important	2.00	Satisfied
Overall Performance of Graduates				
Knowledge and Understanding	1.67	Very Important	1.87	Satisfied
General Qualities	1.60	Very Important	1.74	Very Satisfied
General Skills	1.68	Very Important	1.82	Satisfied
Specialized Skills	1.76	Very Important	2.05	Satisfied

Legend:

1.00-1.80 Very Important/Very Satisfied

3.41-4.20 Unimportant/Dissatisfied

1.81-2.60 Important/ Satisfied

4.21-5.00 Very Unimportant at all/Very Dissatisfied

2.61-3.40 Neutral

knowledge about what the labor market requires or expects from the graduates, limited job search strategies, and the particular work standards when they go to the actual work. They suggested that the school guidance and career services should be made more functional especially by creating more networks with employers and involving students in these networks even in the early years of their college schooling.

Based on the responses gathered from both the graduates and the employers, graduates' employability are affected by the following key skill areas/ attributes: (a) academic skills such as research skills, academic writing, exam preparation, time management among others; (b) extra-curricular activities such as joining clubs and societies, involvement in volunteering, reflecting on hobbies and interests, becoming a student representative among others; (c) work-related and work-based learning such as undertaking work placements, meeting with employers, reflecting on part-time work among others; (d) jobs and careers such as meeting employers, building CVs, practice interviews, career planning and developing the skills required to find a job after graduation; and (e) quality assurance, accreditation/certification of curricular programs that enhances the standards of the program.

Career and Curriculum Enhancement Measures to Enhance Employability of BUCAL Graduates

With the emergence of the reforms in higher education and the present implementation of the K-12 program in the Philippines (Meneses, 2018) and considering the factors affecting employability of BUCAL graduates as revealed by both the graduates and employers, it is imperative for Bicol University particularly the College of Arts and Letters to review the curricular programs to enhance their relevance and quality.

Considering the fact that some courses that are usually taught in college are now downloaded to the Senior High School as part of the k-12 curriculum, it is therefore a challenge to the professional program designers to review the existing curricular programs and evaluate how they can be strengthened such as adding more specialized courses that would enhance the employability of the students. Specialized courses may include those that will develop life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information, media and technology skills. These skills are needed by the students to succeed in the new global economy.

There is a need to strengthen skills that were identified by both the employers and graduates as needing more emphasis on instruction and experience. Likewise, to ensure that students are assisted in creating their own career paths, the university or college guidance and career services should create networks and conduct activities that create awareness among the students of their possible/future career through job and career fairs, mock interviews, and lectures. They are to provide students opportunities to understand and experience the employment process and develop confidence in presenting themselves to the employers as well as facing the real world of work. In addition, there is also a need to integrate or strengthen the internship or work-based learning to enhance employability of the graduates. This will provide the students first-hand experience of the work that would be expected of them after finishing their programs. Similar findings have been reported by Rañeses (2018) on the importance of linkages to better equip graduates with work-based learning.

Therefore, the university should continue to promote and expand opportunities for students to access work-based learning. These experiential opportunities require careful planning and time for reflection must be built in if they are to be effective way of providing students with relevant employment skills, knowledge and awareness of employer culture. These also call for effective, sustained and equitable and reasonable partnership between the university and employers.

Policy Recommendations to Enhance Employability of BUCAL Graduates

The acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed in the successful performance of their respective jobs can be done by having important major subjects be taught by practicing professionals so that students do not only learn the theories but more so the practice of such theories. It is therefore recommended that the college should consider engaging part timers who are practicing professionals to handle some major courses to be able to infuse work-based learning in the course contents. Teaching-learning strategies have also been recommended to achieve excellent academic performance (Banua, 2017).

Considering that accreditation status of the university or college has also a significant impact on the employability of the graduates, it is recommended that BUCAL should continue submitting its curricular

programs for further quality assurance, accreditation, and certification to make sure that the program offerings are well within the level of both local and international standards and quality assurance.

There is a need to integrate or strengthen the internship program, placement and work-based learning into the curricula. The guidance and career service office of the university or the college should take the lead in coordination with the different departments in planning for job search- related activities such as job and career fairs, mock interviews, meeting with employers among others.

Likewise, the college should take seriously the role of the industry as represented by the employers through a meaningful participation in college committee works taking into consideration the valuable input that they can provide such as involving them in the course design and even in the delivery of courses, curricular revisions, and formulation of policy on employability among others.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The graduates of BU College of Arts and Letters are employable however there is a need to effect some revisions in the curricular programs in order to address the issues and concerns raised by both the graduates themselves and the employers.

The study found that most of the graduates are predominantly females, single, and are coming from varied family size with 3-10 members. Majority of the parents are occupying low level of occupations while a minority occupy high levels of occupations and with an average monthly family income ranging from P 5,000-P50, 000. Majority of the graduates are gainfully employed in different workplaces such as in media, schools, banks, private local/national and multinational companies, local and national government offices. Most of them got their first job within one month to less than three years after graduation and they stayed on their first job within one month to less than three years. Compensation benefits such as salaries and wages and other non-monetary benefits such as promotion, advancement, recognition of achievements are the factors that made the graduates stayed or left their first job. Almost all competencies learned by the graduates in the four programs were found very helpful and relevant to their jobs. There were many factors that affected the employment of the graduates. Likewise,

there were several feedback and recommendations by the employers in order to improve the employability of the graduates. Therefore, there is a need to revisit the curricular programs in order to address some issues and to enhance the program offerings.

Based from the findings and conclusions derived from the data, the following recommendations are forwarded to address the issues and concerns on the employability of the graduates.

- a. Review of the curricular programs to enhance their relevance and quality.
- b. Consider adding more specialized subjects that would enhance the employability of the students. Specialized subjects may include those that will develop life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information, media and technology skills.
- c. Integrate or strengthen the guidance and career services by institutionalizing employability activities such as job and career fairs, mock employment interviews and lectures to provide students opportunities to understand employment processes.
- d. Engage more part time professorial lecturers who are practicing professionals;
- e. Continue submitting the programs for higher level of accreditation/certification to improve standards;
- f. Strengthen internship program and work-based learning activities;
- g. The guidance and career service office should help students in creating their career paths through networks. Put this in the recommendation;
- h. Invest more on laboratory and equipment facility to provide a realistic and practical learning;
- i. The university has to look into the competencies vis-à-vis the competencies of the different programs in order to bridge the gap between the course competencies and the industry required competencies to ensure employability of the graduates. Put this under recommendation

- j. Establish a more active interface with employers and engage them in university committee works related to course design and formulation of policies on employability.
- k. Come up with an Industry Advisory Board (IAB) composed of topnotch professionals to serve as consultants in further improving the programs in BUCAL.

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