

## EMPLOYER'S FEEDBACK ON COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES GRADUATES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN JRMSU – MAIN CAMPUS DAPITAN CITY

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### *Abstract*

*Graduate employability has been increasingly the focus of higher education institutions in the Philippines. The demand for higher level of skill includes frequent updating of skills, and excellent technical skills, thus, employers look for graduates who are flexible and willing to learn on the job, technically competent and committed to excellence. Meanwhile, this research undertaking aimed to gather employer's feedback on the performance of graduates in Jose Rizal Memorial State University. Specifically, it determines the number of graduates employed in terms of course program. Further, this paper finds out the employer's rating as to various attributes of the graduates. It utilized a descriptive survey method, utilizing a checklist questionnaire with 86 employers as target sample respondents of the study who hired graduates of JRMSU from SY 2010 – 2011 to 2014 – 2015. The result revealed that most of the employed employees are the Bachelor of Science in Criminology and Computer Science graduates of JRMSU. Moreover, there are industries that cater or hire JMRSU graduates though their course is not suitable. It also further noted, industries suggestion that there are areas the graduates of JRMSU should pay attention such as verbal communication skills, analytical and critical thinking skills and initiative and enterprise. Generally, employers are quite positive about the performance and competence the graduates of the College of Arts and Sciences possessed. It is recommended that the university curriculum designing may be participated by stakeholders and various industries that would maximize the new graduate achievement and capabilities that count for early professional success.*

**Keywords:** *Employer's Feedback, College of Arts and Sciences Graduates, Exploratory Study, JRMSU – Dapitan Campus, Philippines*

## Introduction

Graduate employability has been increasingly the focus of higher education institutions in the Philippines. This is not simply a graduate's ability to find work but it is more about ensuring graduates possess the skills, knowledge and attributes required for future employment success (Precision Consulting, 2007). Further, according to the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) as cited by Yen, et.al., (2009) the primary purpose of higher education is to prepare students for the world of work. Graduates need to be given opportunities to develop attributes besides disciplinary knowledge. This includes communication skills, problem – solving skills, computer literacy, information literacy, ability and willingness to learn, and teamwork. Thus, the graduates need to be skilled workers and not just knowledge is a factor that is highly demanded for any job requirement.

As reported by the Australian Industry Group report (2006), the demand for higher levels of skills, include frequent updating of skills, excellent soft skills as well as technical skills. The survey showed that over 90 percent of the employers look for people who are flexible and adaptive, willing to learn on the job, team players, technically competent and committed to excellence (Thompson et al, 2008). A skilled and adaptable workforce would enable employers to respond to the industry changes. However, there has been a major concern raised by the employers that they are not able to find graduates with the required skills (Hesketh, 2000). In a survey reported by BBC, four out of ten large employers in the United Kingdom struggled to fill graduate vacancies because of a shortage of applicants with the right skills. Likewise, the study of Monash University in Australia showed that more than one-third of foreign students graduated from Australian universities had very poor English skills.

In knowledge – based economy, graduates must bring more than technical knowledge to the job. The Higher Education Institutions are putting emphasis on higher education programs that will encourage and foster skills and qualities in addition to ensuring a sound understanding of subject matter (Yen et.al.,2009). Graduate employability is not doubt a central concern of contemporary higher education (Treleaven & Voola, 2008).

Jose Rizal Memorial State University, established its first offshore as university six years ago in 2009. In the last many years, the population of graduates has been increasing and become one of the top producers of graduates employed in the Zamboanga Peninsula and in the national arena. Meanwhile, this research undertaking aims to gather employer's feedback on JRMSU graduates. It further investigates some of the employers perspective related to the programs and the employability of graduates. Thus, it delves to find out the degree to which the JRMSU graduates have demonstrated attributes in the workforce.

The unique contribution of this research is that it is the first exploratory efforts from the College of Arts of Sciences in Jose Rizal Memorial State University to gather feedback and comments from its graduate's employers. It serves as a significant lean in bringing the institution closer to the industry's demands in the area of human capital development. It provides useful insights and input to the development of outcome-based curriculum in coming up of quality education.

## Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to gather employer's feedback on the College of Arts and Sciences of Jose Rizal Memorial State University graduates from SY 2010 – 2011 to 2014 – 2015 respectively. Specifically, it determines the number of graduates employed in terms of course program. Further, this paper finds out the employer's rating as to various attributes of the graduates. Lastly, it also seeks to explore employer's opinions on the aspects that make a university program more relevant to industry needs and producing graduates who are competent and employable.

## Research Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive survey method of research with the aid of a researchers' made checklist questionnaire. The target respondents of the study are the employers of graduates from JRMSU Main Campus since 2010 – 2011 to 2014 – 2015. The researchers sent questionnaires to target employers who have offered and are still offering employment opportunities to College of Arts and Sciences graduates of Jose Rizal Memorial State University, Main Campus. The items included are designed to measure how well the competencies of the graduates in the working environment match the graduate's attributes of Jose Rizal Memorial State University. It includes also seeking employer's opinions on the aspects that make a university program more relevant to industry needs and producing graduates who are competent and employable. All the data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

## Results and Discussion

An employability performance cannot be concluded simply from the employment rates of a certain institution's graduates. The employability recognizes closely linked to the rapport between higher education institutions and the employers' perspective. It connotes further that employability is the tendency of graduates to exhibit attributes or characteristics that employers foresee as necessary for the effective functioning of their organization in the future (Harvey, 1999 as cited by UNESCO, 2012)

### *Employers Perspective*

For this research paper, the researchers interviewed different supervisors or human resource managers (86 employers) which are categorized as follows: the IT industries, call center industry, establishments, Philippine National Police (PNP), banking and lending institutions. Among 86 employers, almost one-half (45.35%) of them with employed graduates from Bachelor of Science in Computer Science followed by Bachelor of Science in Criminology of about 41.86% respectively (*see Table 1*).

Basically, the flagship courses of the College of Arts and Sciences as far the number of graduates are Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Bachelor of Science in Criminology.

Expectedly, most industries in Zamboanga Peninsula and other neighboring provinces will hire out of these graduates.

Table 1 Distribution of Employed Graduates in the College of Arts & Sciences by Course (n=86)

Course Program	Employer			
	Call Center Industry	PNP/security agency	Banking & Lending Institutions	Other establishments
	<i>Frequency(%)</i>	<i>Frequency(%)</i>	<i>Frequency(%)</i>	<i>Frequency(%)</i>
AB English(n=2)	1(1.16%)	-	-	1(1.16%)
AB Masscom(n=2)	-	-	-	2(2.33%)
AB Pol.Sci. (n=6)	1(1.16%)	-	2(2.33%)	3(3.49%)
BS Com.Sci(n=39)	-	2(2.33%)	21(24.42%)	14(16.28%)
BS Crim(n=36)	-	29(33.72%)	2(2.33%)	5(5.82%)
Total	2(2.33%)	31(36.05%)	25(29.07%)	27(31.40%)

Mostly, the graduates of the College of Arts and Sciences landed in a job to serve the community or in the financial establishments. While only few are call center agents as manifested in the table with only 2 or (2.33%) employees. Meanwhile, some of the graduates are working in other establishments such as center mall, and some food chain establishments. A number of them also became commentator or reporter in some radio stations in Zamboanga Peninsula. On the other side, as observed, the mismatching between the industry and graduates employed still prevails. Industries hired job seekers just to fill in the required number of manpower even though they are not fitted to the work.

### Employer's Rating of Employee as to various Attributes

Table 2 Employers' Feedback on Employed Graduates as to Various Attributes

Competency	Weighted Mean	Description
Punctuality	3.16	Very Good
Verbal Communication Skills	2.24	Fair
Written Communication Skills	2.83	Very Good
Work Ethics	2.72	Very Good
Analytical and Critical Thinking Skills	2.49	Fair
Team Work	3.34	Excellent
Self-management	3.15	Very Good
Initiative and Enterprise	1.83	Fair
Interpersonal Skills	2.73	Very Good
Professionalism	3.22	Very Good
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>2.77</b>	<b>Very Good</b>

The sample respondent employers were asked to rate and give feedback on their employed JRMSU graduates as to the competency acquired. Table 2 shows the employers' feedback on

employed graduates as to various attributes. Among the competencies, verbal skills, analytical and critical thinking skills, and initiative and enterprise were rated as fair by the employers. The results showed that the employers involved in this survey are not fully satisfied with the competency of the hired employee in the workplace. This means that those are areas where the graduates are not able to perform as expected by the employers in the workplace and are seen as the critical area that need attention. Thus, it is recommended that these areas have to be put forth on the planning of curriculum in the University.

The research findings further showed that the employers are very much satisfied on the performance of the College of Arts and Sciences graduates. The graduates are very participative, very alert and always on time. Furthermore, the graduates are friendly, responsible individual and will act as professionals. The engagement that they had in acquiring these competencies at the university has helped them work harmoniously in the workplace. The group work /team building strategies that engaged the graduates are able to adapt easily in working team.

### **Employer's Opinion and Suggestion**

The researchers' interviews with selected establishments or industries pinpointed some strategies, opinions or suggestions being applied to make the JRMSU graduates more competitive and employable compared to established Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in the local, national or even in global arena. In general, according to the surveyed employers graduates are expected to exhibit creative thinking skills, human relation skills, communication skills and problem solving skills. Further, encourage students demonstrate leadership skills and discipline, technology governed and must acquire the principles and concepts thought of their course to be adopted in the workplace. It is suggested by the majority (employer) that in the drafting/reviewing university curriculum designing shall be participated by stakeholders or various employers and should be designed to the extent that it maximizes the new graduate achievement capabilities that count for early professional success.

However, there are some limitations set in this study. One of these is the number of respondents. Therefore, it is suggested that there is a need to enlarge the number of sources of information by covering the large pools of employers in the market. Besides, a focus group discussion can be proposed to find out in-depth ideas from industry.

### **Conclusions**

From the foregoing findings, the researchers had the following conclusions. Many agreed that university curricula should be designed to maximize the graduate achievement in the workplace. There are some industries that cater or hire job seekers though their course is not suitable. Industries believed that there are areas that the graduates of JRMSU should pay attention such as verbal communication skills, analytical and critical thinking skills and initiative and enterprise. The graduates did not fully develop those skills just to give full satisfaction to employers. Generally, the employers are quite positive about the competence of the College of Arts and Sciences graduates.

## Recommendations

This paper confirms some challenges in obtaining some relevant data that provide the research more comprehensive. Thus a large number of employers covering huge pool survey become representative in the market. The graduates must be relatively good in creative thinking skills, human relations skills, problem solving skills and communication skills. The university curriculum designing may be participated by stakeholders or various employers and should be designed to the extent that it maximizes the new graduate achievement and capabilities that count for early professional success. Future research may consider a wider scope of the study from all employers employing university graduates. This can be used to develop and determine the attributes by JRMSU graduates. Opinions and perspective from other stakeholders such as graduates and academics are also important in enriching the research of graduate attributes. Initiatives and feedback are highly required to ensure higher education institutions produced competitive graduates

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