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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENHANCING HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS THROUGH A GRADUATE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

A graduate survey is a critical tool to track the employment condition of the alumni in any academic program. Remarkably, the employability of the graduates serves as a significant index of program effectiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs). This study described the demographic and employment characteristics of the graduates of Sultan Kudarat State University in the different baccalaureate programs among nine (9) campuses from 2016 to 2018. A descriptive type of research was employed in the study which involved a sample of 1,115 graduates. Results showed that the graduates are highly employable as evidenced by a 90.67 percent employment rate. The majority of them are on casual or temporary status and now working as professionals within the region that are related to their college degrees. They found their first job in at most two (2) years by responding largely to advertisements. Salary and benefits are the main reasons for accepting, staying on, and even in changing their first jobs. Communication and human relation skills emerged as the top competencies learned in college that are regarded as very useful to their job.

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INTRODUCTION

Students enter the colleges and universities to complete degrees with the basic intent to be employed and make a living. Most higher education institutions (HEIs) primarily aim to produce highly qualified graduates who can be hired locally and even abroad. HEIs utilize varied strategies to continually improve their curricula and instructional delivery by employing and keeping the best faculty, improving instructional facilities, providing necessary student support systems, and upholding a culture of excellence. These advocacies are likely to stimulate impressive academic training and provide graduates with better work opportunities. In determining whether or not the defined mission and advocacies of the HEI are duly realized or have impacted the graduates, an evaluation through a tracer study is deemed critical. In recent years, the tracking of graduates was no longer carried out in a traditional way where an external research institute is usually commissioned to do the survey. The new approach where the HEI itself plays an active role in the alumni research is known as institutional tracer study. Corollary to that, this graduate survey is a meaningful undertaking to understand the relevance and quality of programs offered by HEIs.

Considering the present Philippine free higher education program, the outcomes of the survey would provide the government sound feedbacks in making informed decisions relative to granting of possible incentives to high performing schools or suspending the state subsidy to the underperforming ones. Schomburg (2016) explained that a graduate survey is a kind of empirical study that exactly provides valuable data in assessing the outcomes of an educational institution. This information can be utilized for institutional development in the context of quality assurance. It also helps the university or college to gather facts on possible issues in a given degree program which can be used for curricular improvement. Besides, it would keep a continuous link between the institution and the graduates, or create a network among them. Also, alumni surveys provide necessary insights into the characteristics of graduates that are helpful to academic administrators and faculty in expanding their professional judgments. Statistical information on the graduates' employment status, job level, job category, length in finding for the first job, means of job searching, pertinent skills acquired from the university, monthly gross income, the relevance of the course to present job, reasons for accepting, staying in and changing the job are important for HEIs to consider in curriculum planning and development (Hazaymeh and Dela Peña, 2015). Graduate surveys similarly reveal qualities of the career 'success' of graduates, as well as giving some idea of which students from which program of higher education institution then perform better than the others.

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In the Philippines, higher educational institutions (HEIs) are categorized as either private HEIs or state universities and colleges (SUCs). While there are thousands of private HEIs nationwide, there are only 114 SUCs around and they are fully subsidized by the government. Sultan Kudarat State University (SKSU) is one of the SUCs and is located in the southern part of the country. Like other state universities, it has the responsibility to monitor and keep track of the performance of its graduates to determine accountability, and to make sure that academic programs have substantially impacted on the individual, the community, and the society. In 2016, the first tracer study was started and carried out for the same objectives, nevertheless, tracking of alumni has to be a continuous activity of the University; hence, this graduate survey.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, the study aimed at tracking the graduates of SKSU from 2016 to 2018 and describing their demographic condition, employment characteristics and perceptions on their current job to establish a broad and workable profile in enhancing the academic programs and practices.

In specific terms, it sought to:

- summarize the graduates' personal factors such as gender, civil status, age, professional examinations passed, place of work, and advanced studies attended;
- determine graduates' reasons for taking the course or degree;
- describe the employment characteristics of the graduates in terms of employment rate, employment status, classification of occupation, line of business in their present employment, and job level position in their present employment, including as well the reasons for accepting, staying, and changing the first job;
- categorize the graduates' means in finding, length in finding, length of stay, and initial gross monthly earning in their first job after college; and
- associate the relevance of the graduates' first job with their completed course, and curriculum in college, as well as the skills they acquired from the University.

METHODS

Research Design: This tracer study used a descriptive research design. It is an appropriate choice since the goal is to describe the people - the graduates who took part in the study. In particular, survey research is employed to gather an ample amount of data that can be analyzed through percentages, averages, ranks, and patterns. <https://study.com/academy/lesson>. The timing of the study considered the suggestions of Schomburg (2016). The study utilized a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods. It was carefully developed to ensure that the results are valid and reliable. Although, the tracer study is institutional the real undertaking was done at the campus level owing to their grasp of the individual program. Results were eventually consolidated to render a comprehensive final report.

Respondents and Sampling Technique: A research population is generally a large collection of individuals that is

the main focus of a scientific investigation. Nevertheless, due to the large sizes of populations, researchers normally cannot include all individuals as it is expensive and time-consuming. <https://explorable.com/research-population>. In this study, the population is the total of graduates in different baccalaureate programs from 2016 to 2018. Graduates of high school, diploma, and graduate studies are excluded. The study used the probability sampling technique. Specifically, stratified random sampling was applied to compute the number of respondents in different groupings. To get an equitable sample of graduates in each batch, campus, and academic program, the proportional allocation was used. The benefit of this approach is that, by grouping, it reduces the difference between different types of individuals, which is conducive to the extraction of representative samples and the reduction of sample size (Shi, 2015). The determination of the sample is based on the population as illustrated in Table 1. The sample size for each year was computed through the online calculator at http://www.raosoft.com/sample_size.html with a 5 percent margin of error (MOE). Detailed discussions of how calculation was done are available on the said website. As can be seen, a total of 975 samples were considered out of the population of 6,334 broken down by year. In every campus, college and degree program, the specific samples were obtained based on proportions. In the distribution of questionnaires, more than the target samples were actually given. As a result, 1,115 forms were effectively retrieved and these were all considered in the statistical analyses making it 18 percent of the population instead of 15 percent as originally designed. The figure is deemed acceptable because in graduate surveys a lower response rate is often expected.

Research Instrument: The instrument used for data gathering was a questionnaire-checklist based on the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Graduate Tracer Study template. The survey form elicited information on pre-employment and employment conditions of the graduates, as well as the relevance of the completed degree and skills acquired in college. The questionnaire had several parts. Part I contains the socio-demographic attributes of the graduates as regards civil status, gender, age, province of origin, and location of residence. Part II included the educational background of the respondents in terms of academic awards received, professional examinations passed, and the reasons for taking the course. The succeeding part contained advanced studies attended by the respondents to include professional or work-related training, and formal studies attended after college, and the reasons for pursuing them. Moreover, the last part dealt with the employment condition comprising the present employment, reasons for being unemployed, employment status and occupation, first job after college, reasons for accepting, staying in and changing the first job, length of stay in the first job, means in finding their job, waiting time before landing on the first job, initial gross monthly salary, the relevance of college degree and curriculum to first job, and the useful competencies for the job that were learned in college.

Data Collection: The data gathering process started in the second quarter of AY 2019-2020 at the campuses or colleges. Data were obtained by sending online questionnaires to graduates with active email accounts. Social media, specifically Facebook (FB) was also utilized to reach out to the target respondents and in distributing the questionnaires to alumni who were working in both public and private institutions, and nearby agencies.

Faculty and employees were likewise provided survey questionnaires for distribution to meet the desired samples of the study. Constant follow-up on the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires was often observed. In most cases, the researchers visited each respondent in their respective workstations to personally distribute the survey tool. Later in the day or week, they were retrieved. Nonetheless, there were cases that the questionnaires were not returned as promised due to varying reasons; hence, follow-up visits or calls were normally done to recover the instruments. At times, the researchers asked from the graduate's relatives the mobile phone numbers of the respondents. Pertinent information was solicited via phone calls following the items as indicated in the questionnaire. Some of the tools were sent through Facebook or to their email addresses. Before sending questionnaires, the researcher gave direction to possibly respond in 1 to 2-week time. If a respondent could not be contacted in person, the researcher did phone interviews, or sometimes, informed them through FB Messenger to gather the needed data. The data elicited from the questionnaires were encoded, tallied, and treated with statistical tools. Most importantly, the researchers assured the respondents that all information would remain confidential throughout the study. Efforts along with maintaining the anonymity of the respondents were observed with prudence even in the collation of data.

Data Analysis: The collected data were tabulated in Microsoft Excel and coded for analysis. Frequency, percentage, and ranking were used to describe the data obtained from the survey. Graphs and a variety of charts were extensively utilized to illustrate the meaning of the data. Campus analysis was first done to come up with an individual report particularly focusing on their respective academic programs. These graduate tracer studies were then gathered from the campuses to produce this integrated and simplified report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data gathered for the study are presented in this section through charts or tables. The presentation is arranged according to the specific objectives of the study which generally progresses from the graduates' demographic profile towards their observations.

Profile of Graduates

Profile of Graduates: Based on the records of the Office of the University Registrar, SKSU produced a total of 6,334 graduates from 2016 to 2018 from its different baccalaureate programs. Of this number, there are 1,115 who gladly responded as participants of this survey. As a descriptive study, it would be more substantial when essential attributes of these respondents such as gender, civil status, age, professional examinations, place of work, place of origin, and advance studies attended are largely discussed.

Gender: Figure 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents by campus. As indicated, the bar graph is explicit of the female graduates' predominance over their male counterparts except in Bagumbayan, Surallah, and Tacurong campuses. It can be noted that academic programs offered in the first 2 campuses are agriculture-based thus they are usually preferred by male students. In the case of Tacurong, records showed that the population of graduates in BS Criminology outperformed other programs during the years in review.

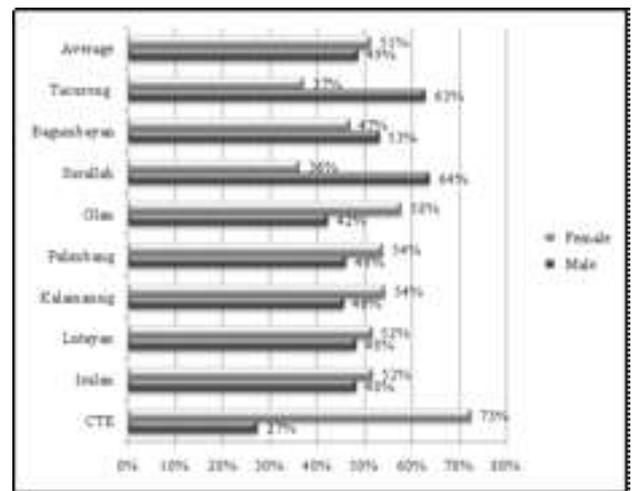


Figure 1. Bar Chart of the Graduates' Gender of Graduates

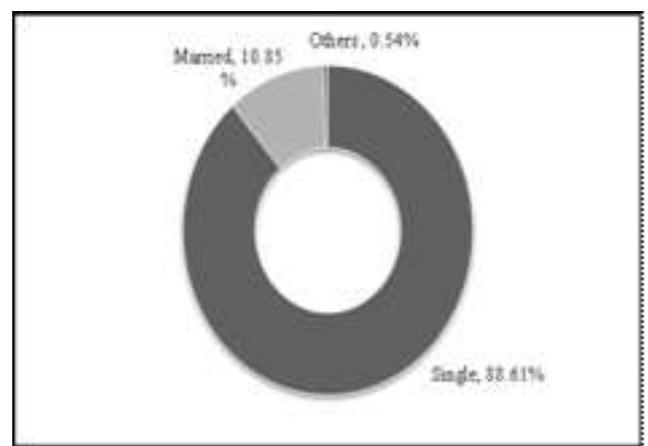


Figure 2. Doughnut Chart of Graduates' Marital Status

More often than not, the said academic program is acknowledged to be male-dominated because it is primarily law enforcement. Generally, the data on graduates is characterized by 53 percent female and 47 percent male. Female supremacy in number is very evident in the College of Teacher Education (CTE) where it offers a Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSED), i.e., more or less 7 in 10 graduates. By tradition, the female students preferred teacher education programs due to the semblance of the profession to the maternal role. Besides, it has been a common notion that teaching is associated with women. This is verified by the result of a PNU study (2014) claiming that the teaching profession is more attractive to females (76%) than to males (24%). The foregoing gender profile is dependable because the Commission on Higher Education posted on its website the 2017-2018 data on graduates of baccalaureate programs showing 60 percent female and 40 percent male distribution. <https://ched.gov.ph/higher-education-graduates>.

In contrast, the PSA Report (2018) indicated a reverse trend in the gender data and employment of Filipinos. It was cited that more than half of 61.6 percent of employed Filipinos are male. The female workers, instead, make up 38.4 percent only. <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/201448-facts-labor-sector-philippines>.

Marital Status and Age: In Figure 2, it is apparent that the majority (almost 98%) of the graduates are single.

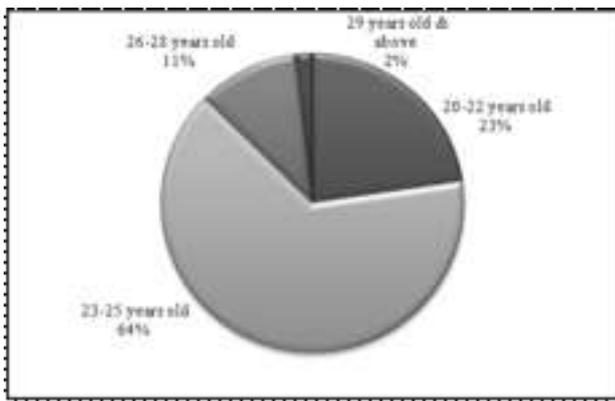


Figure 3. Pie Chart of the Graduates' Age

The marital distribution is understandable considering the participants of the survey belong to the recent batches of graduates. Besides, it is a Filipino tradition to support siblings and parents when working after college graduation. Thus, getting married among fresh graduates is less priority. Implicitly, these are all cultural considering the Filipino values of close family ties. Similar justification would be enough why data in Figure 3 shows that a total of the graduates, that is, 87% have age ranging from 20 to 25 years old. Generally, the participants of this tracer study are young on account of their graduation years.

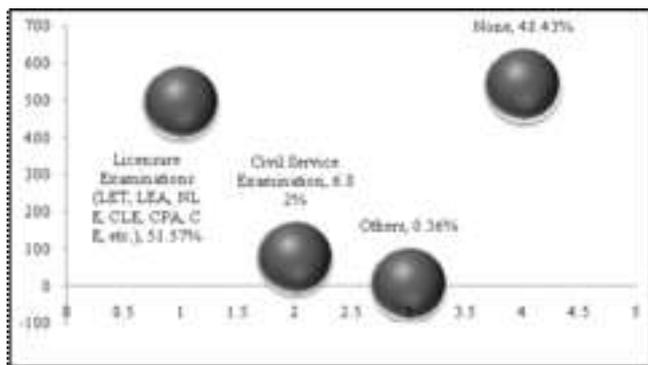


Figure 4. Bubble Chart of the Graduates' Professional Examinations passed by Graduates

Professional Examinations: On professional examinations taken by graduates, Figure 4 indicates that more than one-half or a total of 58.39 percent have passed examinations administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), and the Civil Service Commission (CSC). PRC examinations are intended for those graduates of BS in Criminology, BS in Accountancy, BS in Nursing, Diploma in Midwifery, BS in Civil Engineering, BS in Fishery, BTTE (now BTVTEd), BSED, and BEED. A minimal portion (6.82%) of the graduates also passed the CSC professional and sub-professional examinations as this is a requirement in government service. Other examinations taken and passed by a small number of graduates (0.36%) included the NAPOLCOM, AFPSAT, and the likes. It is worth noting that these minority graduates who seemed desperate in looking for jobs associated with their degrees occasionally attempt to join the uniformed services of the government such as soldiers, policemen, firemen, or jail officers. On the other hand, 48.43% have not passed any examinations or tests at the time of the survey to categorize them as professionals or civil service eligible.

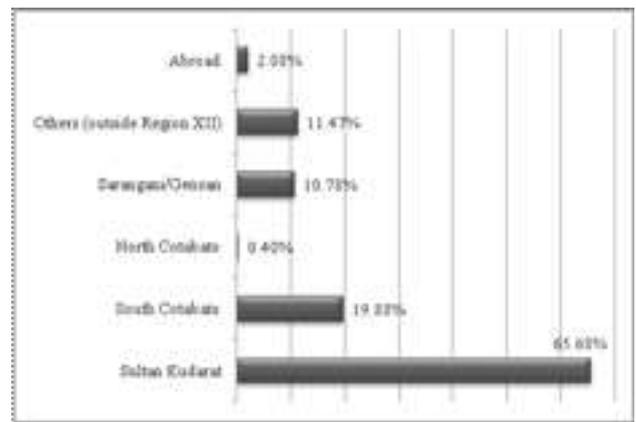


Figure 5. Bar Chart of the Graduates' Place of Work

Place of Work: Graduates were asked where they are presently working and the result is revealing. Figure 5 describes the distribution of their places of work. The majority of them (65.68%) are working within the province of Sultan Kudarat. Also, a total of 31.06 percent have jobs in the adjacent South Cotabato, North Cotabato and Sarangani-Gensan areas. This implies that an aggregated 96.74 percent are actively working in Region XII. Hence, it is indicative that SKSU is producing graduates that ultimately supply the labor force requirements of the region. A small portion of the graduates, however, is assigned outside of SOCSKSARGEN (11.47%) while others abroad (2.08%). Normally, those who went abroad have common reasons. This is essentially associated with demand for high salary and benefits, unstable economic condition locally, peer and family pressure, opportunity to travel abroad, career enhancements, job discrimination experiences, childhood dream, social trend, and government support to OFWs. <https://businessstips.ph/reasons-why-filipinos-want-to-work-abroad/>

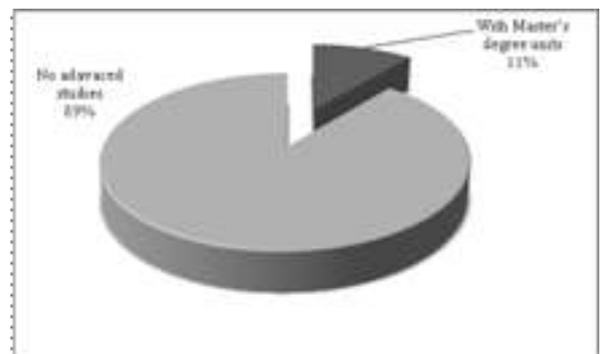


Figure 6. Pie Chart of Graduates who took Advanced Studies

Advanced Studies: Bearing in mind that the graduates have recently completed their undergraduate programs, very few or merely 11 percent of them have pursued advanced studies or took a Master's degree. The nominal segment of those taking further studies can be attributed to the main objective of the students that are to work immediately after graduation. The direction of many college graduates in completing higher education is likely for employment. This is to probably support their family in raising income. Evidence shows that there is 89 percent or about 9 in 10 graduates did not proceed to advanced studies. In a nutshell, it is not the top priority of the graduates. Remarkably, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) has identified both education and employment as two (2) of the underlying dimensions in its multidimensional poverty index. <https://psa.gov.ph/content>

Graduates' Reasons for Taking the Course and Pursuing Advanced Studies

Reasons for Taking the Course or Degree: Students chose a course in college as motivated by somewhat intrinsic or extrinsic. In Table 2, the graduates revealed their common reasons for taking the course or pursuing degrees in the University. Only the first 10 choices of the graduates are included in this presentation. As shown, the top five (5) reasons why the graduates have selected their degrees include the affordability for family, availability of course offerings in the chosen institution, the influence of parents and relatives, a strong passion for the profession, and inspired by a role model. The results suggest that students ordinarily enrolled in SKSU owing to equity of access. There is equity because deserving students from ordinary families can easily afford to pay the minimal tuition fees and other costs charged by the University. Also, the accessibility would mean that students' preferred courses or degrees are duly offered and readily available. Additionally, parental or family influence equally played a decisive part in the students' selection of course in college.

The preceding finding is accurate because according to <https://asianfriends.com.au/filipino-family-values>, by culture, Filipinos have great respect for their elders. Undeniably, harmony in the parent's and student's preferences is key to successful studies. One more important determinant in selecting a college degree is students' strong passion for the profession. It triggers them to be highly motivated in their studies, and encourages them to timely graduate. Moreover, the inspiration provided by some role models such as successful family members, relatives, or friends plays considerably in choosing a degree. Likewise, the secondary reasons that provoked them to enroll in the University are good grades in high school, peer influence, the prospect for promotion or career advancement, as well as the status or prestige of a profession. More than 20% of the respondents have considered these essential factors in taking their completed degrees. The present findings are closely related to Gines' (2014) study where she found out that aside from economic reasons, the graduates also enrolled in PNU because they were similarly looking for a quality institution that would provide them better prospects for their career.

Pursuing Advanced Studies: With the previous results in Figure 6, those graduates who opted to take advanced studies have categorically identified these primary reasons in pursuing it, namely: for promotion, professional development, and others. In particular, the data in Figure 7 discloses that 39 percent and 36 percent took some Master's degree units for promotion, and professional development, respectively. While only a few graduates are taking advanced studies at present, it is anticipated that many of them would consider following through in the future. By Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, the moment deficiency needs are fully met the next needs to be satisfied are those for growth. As explained further, these needs "do not stem from a lack of something, but rather from a desire to grow as a person." When these particular needs are duly satisfied, then self-actualization phase is achieved. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.

Employment Characteristics of Graduates: The subsequent charts and tables illustrate the employment characteristics of the graduates concerning employment rate, employment status, classification of occupation, a major line of business, and job level positions in the present employment

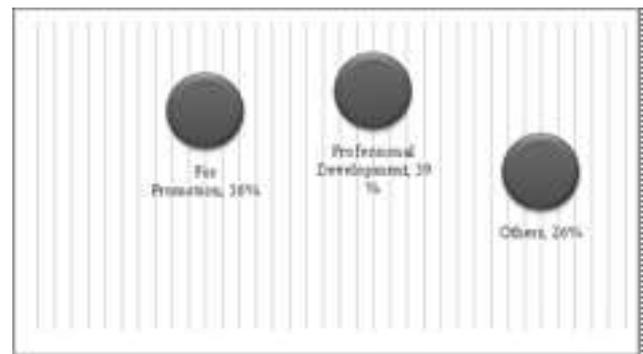


Figure 7. Bubble Chart of the Graduates; Reasons in Pursuing Advanced Studies

Employment Rate: In Figure 8, the critical employment statistics being pursued by this survey are depicted across campuses. The chart specifies that the overall employment rate of SKSU graduates in 2016, 2017, and 2018 is 90.67 percent. This translates to an approximate ratio of 9:10 which means that 9 in every 10 graduates of the university in the last 3 years are gainfully employed. It is obvious that among the campuses, Kalamansig has the highest rate of employability (100.00 percent) suggesting that all graduates who were surveyed are now working. Based on the 2019 Graduate Tracer Study (GTS) Report of the campus, the 92 graduates who were tracked from the BEED, BSIED, BSIT, and BSF programs were found to be currently employed within the province of Sultan Kudarat. In contrast, Lutayan, Palimbang and Bagumbayan revealed to have comparatively lower employment rates of 80.00 percent, 82.05 percent, and 84.38 percent, respectively. Nonetheless, these lesser rates of employment are still impressive since only 2 in 10 graduates do not have work. Relative to the foregoing findings, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) posted recently a report disclosing that the country's employment rate as of July 2019 is 94.6 percent. <http://www.psa.gov.ph/content/employment-rate>. Suffice it to say that SKSU's level of employability of graduates is relatively lower than the average national account. Remarkably, the employment rate of SOCSKSARGEN region in the same period was 95.70 percent. <http://rso12.psa.gov.ph/?page=2>. These employment rates are general and by no means associated with their educational attainment.

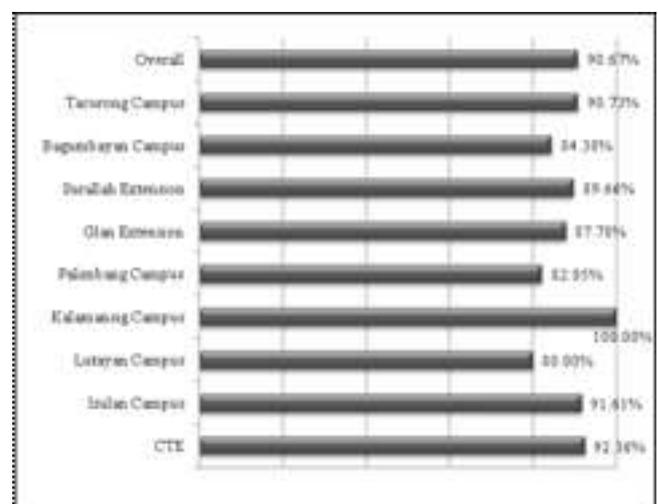


Figure 8. Bar Chart of SKSU Graduates' Employment Rates of Graduates

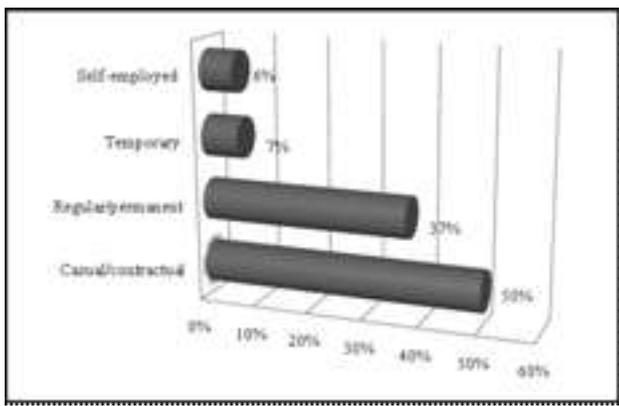


Figure 9. Bar Chart of the Graduates' Employment Status of Graduates

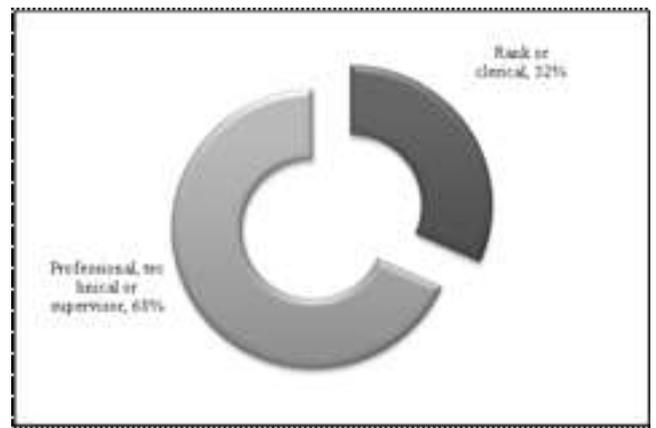


Figure 12. Doughnut Chart of Graduates' Job Level in Present Employment

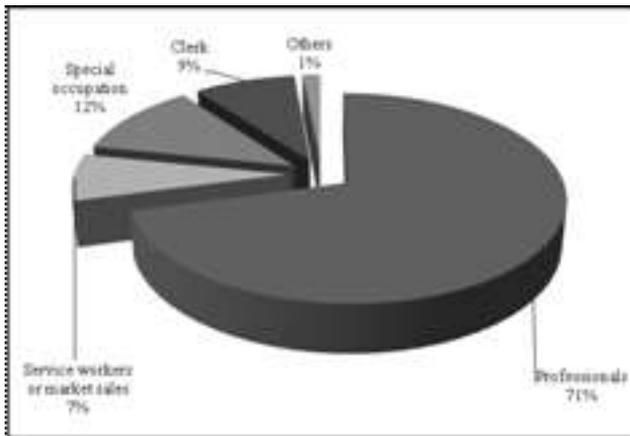


Figure 10. Pie Chart of the Graduates' Classification of Occupation

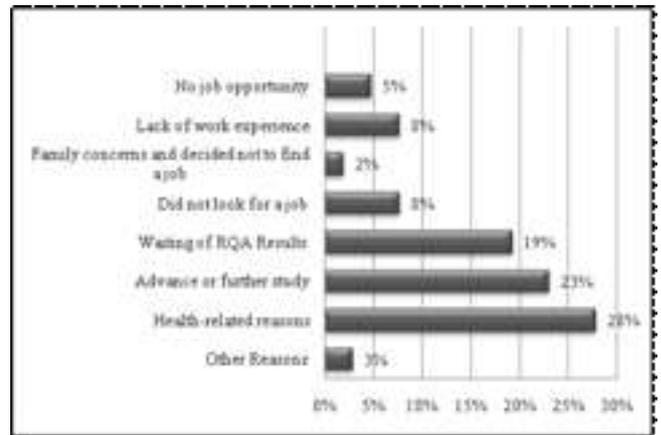


Figure 13. Bar Chart on Reasons of for Unemployment

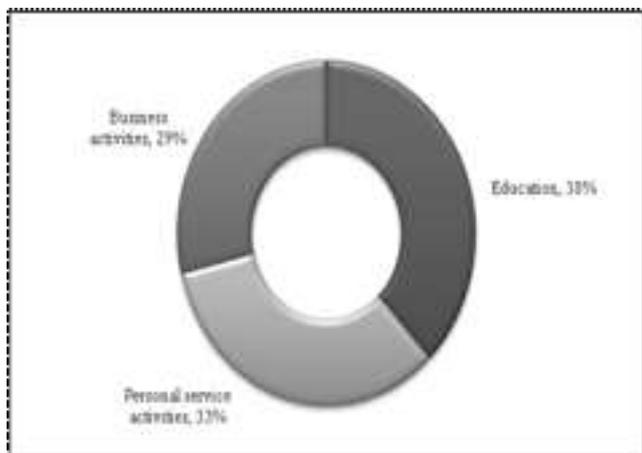


Figure 11. Doughnut Chart on the Major Line of Business in Present Employment

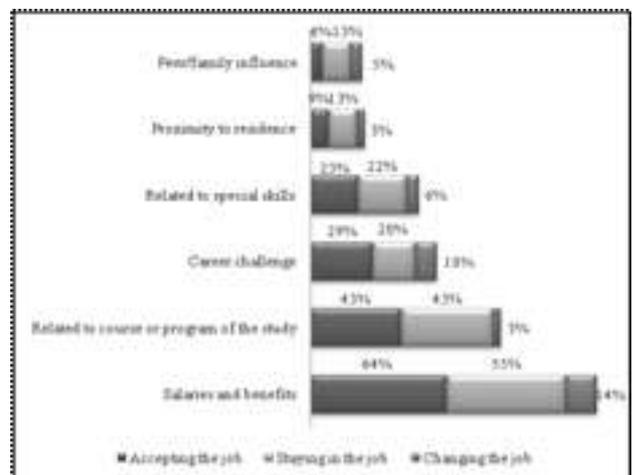


Figure 14. Bar Graph on Reasons in for Accepting, Staying in and Changing the Job

Employment Status: Employees are commonly classified as permanent or temporary. In this survey, Figure 9 reveals some interesting facts when the graduates were asked about the status of their current work. The chart illustrates that 37 percent are already a regular or permanent employee. A big fraction or an aggregated 57 percent are still casual, contractual, and temporary. The asymmetrical distribution is expected such that the permanent and regular ones are relatively lower in number than the contractual or temporary because at the time of the survey these workers have at most 3 years in service. As a rule, the stability of work is more often associated with the length of service.

As articulated in Book VI of the Philippine Labor Code, “any employee, who has rendered at least one year of service, whether such service is continuous or broken, shall be considered a regular employee.” With these premises at hand, it can be inferred that the majority of the casual, contractual, and temporary employees are part of the 2017 and 2018 batches. In contrast, those with permanent or regular status are likely graduates of 2016. The data further shows that self-employed graduates constitute 6 percent only. Self-employed individuals are accounted for as employed in standard labor studies.

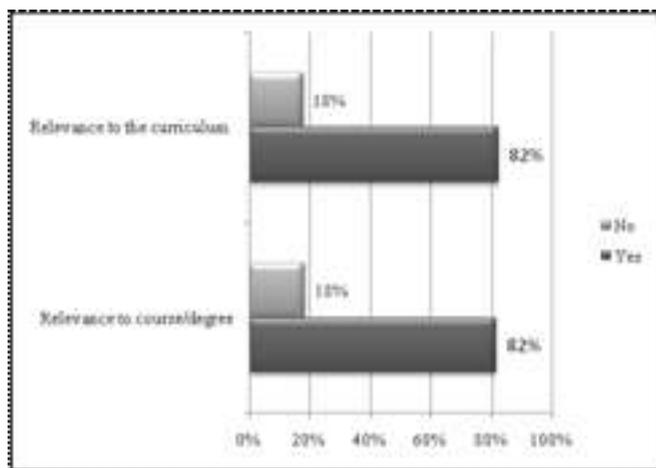


Figure 15. Bar Chart on the Relevance of Graduates' First Job

In the PSA 2019 data, self-employed workers made up 26.2 percent of the total employed Filipinos in July 2018 and 27.3 percent in July 2019. Besides, the temporary constitute 7 percent which is often applied to the public sector. Under the Civil Service Commission (CSC) rules, a temporary appointment is usually issued to employees who did not meet the education, experience, eligibility and training requirements during the application; it also applies in cases where nobody is qualified. For fresh graduates, however, these basic requisites are generally wanting.



Figure 16. The Relevance of Skills acquired from the University as Perceived by the Graduates

Classification of Employment: Based on the classification of occupation, the data in Figure 10 reveals that most of the graduates' category of work (71%) is professionals. This finding is predictable given that most of SKSU's academic offerings are Bachelor's degrees, and some of them are even Board programs. Implicitly, almost 7 in 10 employed graduates are now working according to their professions. Other hired graduates or around 29 percent of them are further classified as clerks, service workers, or market sales, while some of them have special occupations other than their professions.

Line of Business in Present Employment: In terms of line of business, as shown in Figure 11, there is 38 percent of the employed graduates who are engaged in education. Also, 33 percent and 29 percent of them are in personal services and business activities, respectively. The virtually even distribution of the major line of business in the graduates' present employment is attributed to the nature of the academic

offerings in the university. SKSU is primarily mandated to provide instruction in science, technology, arts, agriculture, fisheries, education, business, and hospitality management, and other related fields of studies, thus the tendency for its graduates is also to land on jobs related to these services

Level of Employment: As regards the level of employment, Figure 12 indicates that 68 percent of the graduates are professional, technical, or supervisory. Conversely, 32 percent of them are categorized as rank or clerical level. The uneven distribution is quite notable. The good percentage of employed graduates in the professional, technical or supervisory level only suggests that the employability of the graduates is outstanding. A similar study was undertaken in the 3 colleges of Rizal Technological University (Ramirez, 2014). Nonetheless, the results showed merely 32.8 percent for professional, technical, or supervisory while 24.0 percent for rank, or clerical. The employability rate is found out to be 82 percent comprising 4 graduation batches (2008-2011).

Reasons for Unemployment: As regards the level of employment, Figure 12 indicates that 68 percent of the graduates are professional, technical, or supervisory. Conversely, 32 percent of them are categorized as rank or clerical level. The uneven distribution is quite notable. The good percentage of employed graduates in the professional, technical, or supervisory level only suggests that the employability of the graduates is outstanding. A similar study was undertaken in the 3 colleges of Rizal Technological University (Ramirez, 2014). Nonetheless, the results showed merely 32.8 percent for professional, technical, or supervisory while 24.0 percent for rank or clerical. The employability rate is found out to be 82 percent comprising 4 graduation batches (2008-2011).

Reasons for Accepting a Job, Staying in the Job and Changing their First Jobs: It seems trivial; but in a graduate survey, it is critical to explore the context of one's definitive intent in searching for his first job after college. What made the employee stay in the job or what caused him to change it are equally interesting issues to examine. Figure 14 presents the varied motivations of the graduates in accepting, staying, and changing their first jobs. As shown, when they were surveyed about the reason for accepting their present employment that happened to be their first job, more than one-half of them or 64 percent responded it to be the "salary and benefits." There is 43 percent who also answered that their current work is related to their completed courses. Likewise, 29 percent or nearly 3 in 10 got their jobs since they regarded it as a career challenge. Implicitly, the graduates accepted their present jobs for economic security and professional exercise. The same result was found out in the study of Maderazo (2016) among Dentistry graduates, salaries and benefits came first while career challenge as the second reason. In contrast, the latter is the foremost reason for most engineering graduates for accepting the job followed by salaries and benefits, then related to special skills (Dotong et al., 2016). It is remarkable to note that peer or family influence does not surface as an important factor in getting a job. This signifies that graduates of the University were accepted to their jobs not just for political accommodation or the usual patronage system but because of merit and competence.

Besides, the graduates cited the same primary reasons for staying in the jobs. This finding is comprehensible since these

factors are essential motivators to satisfy workers. It is natural for an employee to remain in his work when he or she is receiving a reasonable salary, and enjoying the standard benefits. Other tracer studies showed comparable findings (Garcia, Vergara, and Lansang, 2016; Dotong et al., 2016; Celis, Festijo & Cueto, 2013). In most cases, unfair salaries and unacceptable benefits forced employees to leave and change their jobs. There is a high probability that one has to leave a job if the salary and benefits are not reasonable at all. Besides, the presence of opportunities such as competitive pay, challenging position, and provisions of fringe benefits are strong enticements that effectively prompt lowly-paid workers to abandon their existing jobs.

Graduates' Means in Finding, Length in Finding, Length of Stay and Initial Gross Monthly Earning in their First Job after College

Means in Finding the First Job: Searching for a job for the first time is ordinarily a challenge to fresh college graduates except for those with the family business. These privileged individuals are even absorbed directly to perform a supervisory role without passing the rank and file, or clerical posts. As shown in Table 3, the graduates found their first job using several approaches. Nonetheless, the data does not entail that the graduates were eventually hired through these employment attempts. It merely shows the specific means that they applied during job hunting. Among the top 3 identified ways that the graduates used in finding their first jobs are responding to the advertisements, walk-in applicants, and recommended by someone. At present, job openings or opportunities are generally published or posted through advertisements on bulletin boards, television, radio, newspapers, or social media. This is the most popular means for applicants to access or find jobs since the available vacancies, minimum qualifications, and other requirements are readily stated. Secondly, seeking or applying for a job among graduates was made possible as "walk-in applicants." By practice, this is done when the applicants directly submit application documents or intent to work without prior information whether or not a particular job is open. The attempt to work is generally made in the absence of advertisements. It is practically undertaken without distinct assurance of being hired the fact that needs are not explicit. Ordinarily, the result of the application solely depends on the discretion of the employer and it happens when the applicant's credentials are very impressive or his competencies are necessary for the company. Thirdly, more than one-fourth of 26.31 percent of the graduates found their first job through other people's recommendations. Nowadays, it is a common observation that applicants for the job asked the recommendation of someone particularly from well-known people in the community, or somebody who is in authority. The recommendation is no requirement in hiring employees both in the government and private sectors. Nevertheless, the modus of securing this endorsement from influential individuals becomes an unhealthy tradition under the Philippine setting. Montiel (2002) vividly discussed it as an objective component of our political culture.

Other modes in finding jobs among graduates include information from friends, Job Fair, DOST JLSS, and family business. Sometimes, having a network of friends would also be an avenue to find available jobs or opportunities for work. Friendship among graduates of the same batch in college is intimate, hence another accepted and easier means of finding

jobs. Likewise, finding the first job was also made possible through the annual Job Fair undertaken by the SKSU Guidance and Testing Center in coordination with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), as well as other industries. In the case of Teacher Education graduating classes, the respective Guidance Counselors often ensured that the pre-service seminar with the DepEd is effectively carried out. Jobwise, the DOST scholars are privileged because they were primarily given preference in hiring after graduation. College students are therefore provided obvious cue on what is the guaranteed or easiest way to find a job aside from having a family business.

Length of Time Spent in Finding the Job: Table 4 presents the data on the graduates' length of time spent in finding their first job. As indicated, the searching for the first job takes in less than a month as the fastest, while 3 to 4 years as the longest. It is understood that the finding of a job commenced at the time they graduated from college. It took 1 to 6 months for the majority of the graduates (41.44%) to find their first job. A closer look at the data indicates also that a total of 94.07 percent found their first job within 2 years. The foregoing result means that 9 in 10 graduates were able to get their job within this period after graduation in college. Interestingly, there is 6.82 percent were employed in less than a month. These individuals might have been hired early as the level of occupation only demanded proof of graduation but not hard requirements such as licensure examinations or eligibility.

The Extent of Stay in the First Job: In Table 5, the data about the extent of the stay of the graduates in their first jobs are presented. About one-third of the graduates (32.64%) stayed in their first job for 1 to less than 2 years. Also, there is 26.90 percent who stayed in their job from 7 to 11 months. It can be noted further that a total of 73.10 percent have barely stayed in their first job for less than a month to less than 2 years. This indicates that in 2 years, many of them might have discovered that there were better jobs around so they ultimately left. Notably, a small percentage of graduates (1.88%) had stayed very short in their jobs, that is, for less than a month only. It can be held that for such a limited period in working, they met challenges or issues that provoked them to change jobs. This could also be the case of the 0.79 percent who opted to change their job after 3 to 4 years. Most likely, they decided late in leaving, because typically, employees become more attached to their jobs the longer they stayed on it. Relative to this, the earlier findings revealed that some of the employed graduates changed their jobs due to issues on salaries and benefits, career challenges, peer or family influence, the program of study, special skills, and proximity to residence.

It looks that there is only 9.07 percent of them with gross earnings of PPhp 25,000 or higher per month. As they are few in numbers, they can be figured out as those regular or permanent professionals in a supervisory role and have been in their jobs for 3 to 4 years already. Those having a gross monthly earning from PPhp 15,000 and above constitutes 59.73 percent of the distribution. Most probably, these are the graduates who are categorized in the professional, technical, or supervisory level. In contrast, there are graduates whose gross monthly earning is PPhp 10,000, and below; they constitute about 40.27 percent. They were likely the hired ones whose level of occupation is categorized as rank and file, or clerical.

Table 1. Population and Sample Distribution

Campuses	Populations*			Samples		
	2016	2017	2018	2016	2017	2018
Year						
ACCESS	441	583	660	78	92	89
Palimbang	75	84	84	13	13	11
Isulan	274	213	355	48	34	48
Kalamansig	128	146	95	23	23	13
Lutayan	40	41	154	7	6	21
Tacurong	503	630	712	89	99	96
Bagumbayan/SNA	34	69	66	6	11	9
Glan	190	199	189	33	31	25
SUNAS	114	101	154	20	16	21
Sub-total	1,799	2,066	2,469	317	325	333
Total			6,334			975

*Source: University Registrar

Table 2. Ranked Reasons of Graduates for Taking the Course

Reasons	f	%	Rank
Affordability for family	474	43%	1
Availability of course offering in chosen institution	367	33%	2
Influence of parents and relatives	359	32%	3
Strong passion for the profession	342	31%	4
Inspired by a role model	281	25%	5
Good grades in high school	267	24%	6
Peer influence	251	23%	7
Prospects for promotion or career advancement	244	22%	8
Status or prestige of profession	234	21%	9
No particular choice/no better idea	131	12%	10

Table 3. Graduates' Means in Finding their First Job

Means	f	%	Rank
Respond to an advertisement	452	44.71%	1
As walk-in applicant	363	35.91%	2
Recommended by someone	266	26.31%	3
Information from friends	187	18.50%	4
Job Fair	31	3.07%	5
Arranged by school's Job Placement Officer	10	0.99%	6
DOST JLSS	7	0.69%	7
Family business	2	0.20%	8

Table 4. Length of Time for Graduates in Finding the First Job

Time	F	%	Rank
Less than a month	69	6.82%	4
1 to 6 months	419	41.44%	1
7 to 11 months	245	24.23%	2
1 year to less than 2 years	218	21.56%	3
2 years to less than 3 years	38	3.76%	5
3 years to less than 4 years	4	0.40%	6

Table 5. Length of the Stay of Graduates in their first Job

Time	f	%	Rank
Less than a month	19	1.88%	5
1 to 6 months	118	11.67%	4
7 to 11 months	272	26.90%	2
1 year to less than 2 years	330	32.64%	1
2 years to less than 3 years	175	17.31%	3
3 years to less than 4 years	8	0.79%	6

Table 6. Initial Gross Monthly Earning in the First Job

Amount	f	%	cf<	cf>
Below P 5,000.00	32	3.26%	3.26%	100.00%
P 5,000.00 to less than P 10,000.00	363	37.00%	40.27%	96.74%
P 15,000.00 to less than P 20,000.00	335	34.15%	74.41%	59.73%
P 20,000.00 to less than P 25,000.00	162	16.51%	90.93%	25.59%
P 25,000 and above	89	9.07%	100.00%	9.07%

The Relevance of the Graduates' Course, Curriculum and Skills acquired from the University on their First Job

The Relevance of the Course and Curriculum to the First Job: The graduates' assessment of the relevance of the course and curriculum as well as the essential competencies learned from the University about their first job is significant for academic, curricular, and institutional development. Being the direct beneficiaries of the delivery of instructional provisions and services, it is assumed that their actual experiences, observations, insights and suggestions are undisputable and incredibly valuable. Their completed degrees and the curriculum they had in college. The survey asked them to answer either "Yes" or "No" for the relevant and not relevant issue, respectively. The result is overwhelming. It is indicated that the majority (82%) agreed that their first job is relevant not only to their completed course or degree but also to the curriculum they have in college. It means that there are about 8 in 10 or 4 in 5 graduates who affirmed the responsiveness and direct bearing of the earned degrees and curricular training on their initial jobs. Suffice it to say that the University had trained and equipped them well to face the world of work. Also, the data implies that only 1 in 5 disagreed, and this proportion is simply negligible.

Relevance of Skills Acquired in the University toward the First Job: Moreover, the graduates' assessment of whether or not the different competencies they developed from the University are useful in their first job is presented in Figure 16.

As shown, more than 50 percent of them agreed that the learned communication skills, human relations skills, cooperation and collaboration skills, information, media and technology skills, critical thinking skills, leadership skills, and problem-solving skills from the University were important competencies that are valuable to their present jobs. To some extent, this result is consistent with the findings of a Malaysian study (Tanius, 2018) on employability skills of Business program graduates that the most applied skills in work are problem-solving, Nonetheless, below one-half of these graduates chose research skills, persuasion and negotiation skills, numeracy skills, and entrepreneurial skills. It connotes that these abilities are not as beneficial as the others in their work. Given also that the graduates are employed in diverse lines of business within the region, outside the region and even abroad, it denotes the impression that the various curricula of the University remain as functional, relevant and responsive to the needs of the industries as well as the demands of time.

Several researchers indicated that the foregoing findings are reliable. In Gines' (2014) study among PNU graduates, the majority of the respondents confirmed that they apply to a great extent in their current employment the skills that they acquired from the university. Topping the list are communication skills, human relation skills, leadership skills, and problem-solving skills. In a similar tracer study, Ramirez et al. (2014) also proved that the graduates' acquired competencies and skills in their college life were highly useful in and relevant to their present jobs. As found out, communication skills, critical thinking skills, and information technology skills are the leading three relevant skills. These findings are also in agreement with the results of Maderazo's (2016) study among dentistry graduates. The result clearly showed that communication skills, human relation skills, and problem-solving skills are important for graduates to meet the demands of their jobs. In the case of Malaysia, the Ministry of

Education (2015) reported that the reason for unemployment among the new graduates in the country is skill gaps. www.hhttp://mohe.gov.my. Contrary to the results of the current study, their current graduates' skill supply is not able to meet the skill requirements of the industry and this is a critical issue.

Findings

Based on results and discussions, the following findings are hereby enumerated:

Graduates' Profile

- Overall, the female (53%) dominates over the male (47%) graduates. The trend is very evident in the College of Teacher Education (CTE) where female dominance reached up to 73 percent.
- The majority or 98 percent of the graduates are single.
- Graduates with age from 20 to 25 years old constitute 87 percent.
- A total of 51.57 percent have passed examinations administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC).
- Most of the graduates (65.68%) are assigned in various industries, offices, and agencies in Sultan Kudarat. The other 11.47 percent are working in some other provinces of the region.
- Very few (11%) of them have pursued advanced studies.

Common Reasons for taking the Course or pursuing Advanced Degrees in the University

- Top five (5) reasons for taking the course or pursuing degrees in the University included the affordability for family, availability of course offerings in the chosen institution, the influence of parents and relatives, a strong passion for the profession, and inspired by a role model.
- Secondary reasons that motivated them to enrol in SKSU were good grades in high school, peer influence, prospects for promotion or career advancement, as well as the status or prestige of a profession.
- Graduates opted to take advanced studies due to these primary reasons, namely: job promotion (39%) and professional development (36%).

Employment Characteristics of Graduates

- The overall employment rate of SKSU graduates in 2016, 2017 and 2018 is 90.67 percent. This means that only 1 in 10 graduates are not employed.
- Kalamansig campus is noted to have the highest employability rate, that is, 100.00 percent. In contrast, Lutayan, Palimbang, and Bagumbayan revealed to have comparatively lower employment rates of

- 80.00 percent, 82.05 percent, and 84.38 percent, respectively.
- Employment status of the graduates indicated that an aggregated 57 percent are casual, contractual, and temporary while 37 percent are regular or permanent employees.
- On the classification of occupation, 71 percent of the graduates are working as professionals. The remaining 29 percent are classified as clerks, service workers, or market sales.
- As to the line of business, 38 percent of the employed graduates were engaged in education, while 33% and 29 percent of them are in personal services, and business activities, respectively.
- On the level of employment, 68 percent of them are in professional, technical, and supervisory. Conversely, 32 percent are categorized as rank, or clerical level.
- Unemployed graduates cited reasons as no job opportunity, lack of work experience, family concerns, did not look for a job, waiting for RQA results, advanced study, health-related, and others. The top 2 factors are health-related issues, and taking of advanced, or further study.

Graduates' Reasons for Accepting the Job, Staying in the Job, and in Changing the Job

- As regards the reasons for accepting the present employment, above one-half (64%) responded "salary and benefits", 43 percent chose related to their completed course, 29 percent regarded it as career challenge, and 23 percent claimed related to special skills.
- For staying in the present job, they mentioned similar reasons such as salary and benefits (55%), related to the course (43%), related to special skills (22%), and career challenge (20%).
- For those who changed jobs, they cited reasons like salary and benefits (14%), career challenge (10%), related to special skills (6%), and peer/family pressure (6%).

Graduates' means in finding, length in finding, length of stay and gross monthly earning in their first job

- The top 3 identified means that graduates used in finding their first job are responding to the advertisement (rank 1), the walk-in applicant (rank 2), and recommended by someone (rank 3). Job vacancies as published or posted on bulletin boards, television, radio, newspapers, or social media remains to be the most popular means for applicants to find jobs.
- On the length of time they spent in finding the first job, it took 1 to 6 months for 41.44 percent of the graduates. Also, a total of 94.07 percent found their first job within 2 years.

- On the extent of stay in the first jobs, nearly one-third of them (32.64%) made it for 1 to less than 2 years. It is also evident too that a total of 73.10 percent have stayed in the job for less than a month to less than 2 years.
- For the initial gross monthly earnings in the first job, it showed that 59.73 percent of the employed graduates have earned Php 15,000 and above, while 40.27 percent of them have Php 10,000 and below.

The Relevance of the Graduates' Course, Curriculum and Competencies acquired from the University on their first Job

- The majority (82%) of the graduates agreed that their first job is relevant to their completed course, as well as to the curriculum they have in college.
- More than one-half of them agreed that among the skills they acquired in the University such as communication, human relations, cooperation and collaboration, information, media and technology, critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving are significant to their present jobs.
- Less than one-half of them considered other skills like research, persuasion and negotiation, numeracy, and entrepreneurial, as equally desirable.

Conclusions

From the foregoing findings, the following conclusions are hereby drawn:

- Generally, the graduates under survey were predominantly female, single, 20 to 25 years old, have passed examinations administered by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC), presently working in the province, and not pursuing advanced studies.
- They took the course or degree in the University not just for affordability or economic reason but also as a personal choice, the influence of parents and relatives, strong passion for the profession, and the inspiration provided by the role models. There were few takers of advanced studies among the graduates and justified the professional undertaking mainly for job promotion and professional development.
- The overall employment rate of SKSU is impressive at 90.67 percent. Mostly have casual, contractual, or temporary status considering their recency in the jobs. Similarly, the majority are working as professionals. They are predominantly engaged in education, while not so many in personal services, and business activities. Graduates employed in the professional, technical, and supervisory exceeded over those in the rank, or clerical level. Unemployment of graduates was due mainly to health-related issues and the pursuit of advanced or further study.

- Salary and benefits appeared to be the main reason for accepting and staying in the present job, as well as in changing the first job. The graduates also stayed in their job since it is related to their course while many of them left their first job because of career challenges. Responding to advertisements remained to be the most popular means for graduates in finding their first job. The majority of them found their first job within the first 2 years, and have stayed in it for less than a month to less than 2 years. Most of them have initial gross monthly earnings of Php 15,000 and above.
- Most of the graduates agreed that their first job is relevant to their completed course and curriculum. Additionally, the majority acknowledged that communication, human relations, cooperation and collaboration, information, media and technology, critical thinking, leadership, and problem-solving skills that they acquired in the university are significantly useful to their present jobs.
- Taking advanced study was found to be one of the reasons for unemployment among graduates. Given the Job Fair that the Guidance and Testing Center is conducting annually to expectant graduates before graduation, it is therefore proposed that organizers or resource speakers should highly discourage the immediate pursuit of advanced study after graduation. Rather, attendance to graduate education shall only be undertaken when somebody had already achieved ample practical experiences of what he learned from the undergraduate degree. An advanced study has to be treated not merely as supplemental input to existing knowledge but a professional intent to further explore and attain a deeper understanding of one's concrete experiences in the field or to solve philosophical problems.
- Despite categorical results about responding to advertisements as effective means in finding their first job, it is also advised that the University has to provide other avenues or opportunities for quick hiring of graduates. The Office of the Alumni Relations can be designated to establish a network among employed alumni particularly those in privileged positions of various agencies, offices, and industries on their job vacancies and other personnel needs. Employment updates from this office emanating from these reliable people are helpful information for graduates to consider in seeking jobs.
- Since the graduates agreed on the relevance of skills they acquired from SKSU, explicitly, communication, human relations, cooperation and collaboration, information, media and technology, critical thinking, leadership and problem-solving skills, about their present jobs, it is likewise proposed that these competencies be upheld and reemphasized at times of curriculum review, planning and development particularly in formulating program outcomes. Proponents, developers, reviewers, and planners of the curriculum should regard these identified critical skills as indispensable attributes when envisioning the graduates of the University.
- It is recommended that future graduate tracing should also include inferential problems making use of the demographic traits of the graduates and the parents, as well as the characteristics of academic programs relative to the different areas in accreditation, as correlates of employability. This would identify good predictors to develop a model that can be used to manage a higher employment level.
- It is also suggested that a Graduate Tracer Unit in the Office of the Alumni Relations should be institutionalized and properly capacitated in terms of undertaking applied research particularly graduate survey for effectiveness and efficiency of future studies. It is expected that the unit shall come up with a Graduate Survey Handbook in order to harmonize the processes and methods in carrying out an alumni survey. This proposal necessitates appropriate funds hence the concerned Director has to consider it in planning.

Recommendations

Following the findings and conclusions of this study, the researchers thus formulate the following recommendations:

- The current tracer study merely considered the profile of the graduates such as the gender, age, examinations passed, place of work, and advanced studies. It is suggested that in the later graduate survey, the characteristics of the parents as well as the attributes of the university should also be explored. These variables are thought to be associated with the employability of the graduates.
- As found out, the leading reason of graduates in taking the course or pursuing a degree in the University is for economic reasons, explicitly, affordability for family, while personal choice and a strong passion for the profession follow. Since higher education is already free, the Guidance and Testing Center has to thoroughly emphasize during career information campaigns among senior high school students that the vital consideration in choosing a college degree is the personal choice and one's passion for the profession. It is observed that college students are highly motivated in their studies when the driving force is intrinsic and personal.
- Despite the apparent high employability of SKSU yet it falls below the national record during years in review. Thus, it is recommended that the University should undertake additional efforts to level up the present rating. This can be made possible through strengthening the pre-service engagement between the University and partner industries such as scholarship grants, study tours, on-the-job training, job immersion, etc. It is deemed that the scouting of potential employees by the industry partners can embark on these work-oriented activities.

- Moreover, each Program Chairperson in a college or campus is encouraged to undertake a regular or annual graduate survey to assess every batch of graduates. This will enable the university to analyse effectively the characteristics of the graduates of every program and eventually come up with policy directions that are specific and appropriate. Besides, a group of students in Methods of Research or any research-related subject may be tapped to embark on the survey under the guidance of an Adviser to minimize costs and expose these young students to applied research.

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