

Employability of Tourism Management Graduates: The Case of a Private Higher Educational Institution (HEI) in the Philippines

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Abstract

This descriptive study determined the employability of Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM) graduates of Notre Dame of Dadiangas University – a catholic school in General Santos City, Philippines. It examined the profile of the graduates, their professional development, employment conditions, and helpfulness of skills learned, and values developed during college to their present condition. There were 147 respondents in the study and the data analysis tools used were frequency, percentage, and ranking. Based on the results of the study, skills learned in college such as cognitive, communication, leadership, interpersonal, and information technology skills were very helpful in their present condition. The values of family spirit, simplicity, the integrity of creation, presence, and participation, love of work, and quality education were rated very helpfully by the respondents as well. It is recommended that the school offer more skills-based subjects like tour guiding, travel promotions, etc. to enhance the communication and interpersonal skills of BSTM graduates. Further, the on-the-job training (OJT) of the students must be retained but should have more venues and companies as options.

Keywords: employability, tourism management, Private Higher Educational Institutions, professional development, skills, values



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. The potential of this industry lies in its interdependent sectors and the World Travel & Tourism Council has estimated that worldwide, 1 out of 11 jobs are tourism-related ones. Thus, employment opportunities in this industry are extensive (UNWTO highlights, 2016). In the Philippines, employment in tourism characteristic industries was estimated at 5.0 million in 2015, higher by 3.4 percent compared to 4.8 million in the previous year (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). With this increase, formal education, training, and seminars are crucial in preparing a competent workforce.

The Philippine tourism education system, which started in the 1970s, was reformed to produce graduates that will not only survive but thrive in a borderless economy, emphasizing skills and competencies instead of just managerial theory

(CHED CMO 30, 2006). Thus, the Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM) together with other hospitality management courses were offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) nationwide.

The graduates of these education and training institutions will eventually leave their portals and seek a job in their field of specialization. But with several developments and changes such as the changing labor market, growing worldwide competition, technological advances, and changing demand patterns in tourism, graduates must possess employability skills and values that would enable them to cope with the changing circumstances. Universities are therefore encouraged to embed key skills in their curricula, yet there is often a considerable gap between what educational institutions offer and what is needed and required by the industry (Ungui et al., 2014).

Employability after graduation is a major consideration of why a lot of students choose the program they study in college (Ebesah et al.,

2014). Universities and other institutions know better their graduates and their careers by conducting tracer studies. Studies on the employment status of Tourism graduates have been published by various schools such as the Lyceum of the Philippines University- Batangas, Laguna State Polytechnic University – Los Baños Campus and the University of Santo Tomas in different journals locally and abroad. The results of these studies show that majority of the graduates are employed between 0-6 months after graduation, most are in the government sector, particularly in services, and they have rank and file level. Among the values given in the survey, the majority considered professional integrity as the most important value. A study shows that employers rated high on identified graduate attributes that are important to be employed in the industry. These attributes are exceeding customer expectations, aligned work experience, communication skills, handling demanding customer and volume of workload and multicultural workplace. The graduates who possess these attributes would have a better chance of being employed by cruise companies (Dumlao et al., 2017).

The Notre Dame of Dadiangas University (NDDU) has been offering the course BSTM since 2009. The curriculum includes concepts pertinent to the management and operations of the tourism industry and its allied industries. It has exposure activities like field trips, on-the-job training, national certifications, research works, and other school activities that would supplement classroom instruction. Evaluation of the program is necessary to facilitate more effective learning, particularly among the BSTM students, and to better improve the curriculum.

Research Objectives. This study aims to determine the employability of BS Tourism Management graduates from 2013-2019. Specifically, this study determines the profile of the BSTM graduates. It identifies the professional development they pursued after graduation. More so, it looks into the employment conditions of the graduates. Finally, it examines the skills and values they perceived as most helpful in their current jobs.

LITERATURES

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined tourism as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from the place visited”. Early tourism happened for 2 reasons: travel for business and trade, or religious travel. The end of World War II brought about a surplus of airplanes and ushered in a new era where people have time, money, and interest to travel for pleasure and business.

In the Philippines, the statistics from the Department of Tourism for the first 7 months of 2019 would show more than 4 million international tourists arriving in the country. Therefore, the different tourism-related establishments of the country would need manpower to be able to deliver a quality service to the tourists. The different tourism-related establishments that are increasing in numbers year after year here in the Philippines should look into their present and strategic goals before they employ potential and suitable workers. They recruit, screen, and hire potential candidates for different positions in the company using criteria like age, educational attainment, work experience, and others. The labor markets, which supply people to produce services and goods, must be able to meet these criteria of the industries (Noe et al., 2012).

Professional Development and Employment Status. Students, after graduation, take different paths. Some look for employment to have income and help provide for their needs and that of their families. Other students take further studies for them to enhance or gain new skills in industry or craft that is related or unrelated to their baccalaureate degrees. Since the Philippines embraces formal and non-formal education, students can pursue post-baccalaureate studies like masters and doctorate degrees after graduation. On the other hand, non-formal education includes educational opportunities, even outside school premises, that facilitate the achievement of

specific learning objectives for clientele, especially the out-of-school youths or adult illiterates who cannot avail of formal education. In the country, non-formal education has been extensively implemented through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) which is called the Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. Orbeta (2016) cited that the top three offerings of TVET programs in the country include Tourism, ICT and Health, and Social, and other community development. TVET clients by education before training were 50% high school graduates, followed by college undergraduates (19%) and college graduates (13%). The reason that most of them took TVET courses is to get a job or employment.

A different group of graduates may join their family business. Private and government organizations may offer free or paid seminars to help improve the human capital of an area. The Department of Labor and Employment launched a facilitation program “My First Job” which provides skills training funded by the Asian Development Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency. (ICEF Monitor, 2013). The Department of Tourism offers different trainings and seminars for tourism workers and its allied sectors to increase human capital. Human capital refers to the productive capabilities of individuals – that is the knowledge, skills, and experience that have economic value (Noe et.al, 2012). Countries with high human capital are attractive sites for direct foreign investment that creates high-skill jobs.

Status of employment would include that which are regular employees and probationary or casual employees. A regular employee is one who has been engaged to perform activities that are usually necessary or desirable in the usual business of the employer. On the other hand, a probationary or casual employee is an employee that is on a “trial-basis” employment because he has to meet the standards set by the employer to qualify for regularization. However, there are non-standard forms of employment that have become a contemporary feature of labor markets around the world (ILO, 2016).

Non-standard employment forms include temporary employment and part-time and on-call work. Temporary employment refers to the fixed-term contracts like project or task-based contracts, seasonal contracts and casual work including daily work while part-time and on-call work refers to normal working hours fewer than full-time equivalents. ILO reported that temporary employment is a prominent feature of labor markets in developing countries. In industrialized countries, temporary employment has been growing and it is observed that women make up 57 percent of part-time employees. This may be because women combine paid work with domestic and care responsibilities. Another reason for this is the seasonality -- during some months of the year, the number of tourists is very low so the tourism and hospitality business sectors cut staff, tourism (Aynalem et al., 2016) This factor causes establishments to offer part-time and/or excessive hours of work to employees or have low-paid (or unpaid) family labor. This is also cited by the report of UNWTO (2014), the accommodation industry employs a high proportion of young workers and a significantly higher level of part-time, seasonal, and casual labor than other tourism industries due to its “peak and lean season” of demand.

Another group would be composed of the self-employed. Self-employed refers to those individuals who prefer to have their own business or practice their craft outside a company, they put up their own business (entrepreneurial activities) or do freelance work. Tourism businesses tend to provide incentives for the entrepreneurial behavior of individuals. At least 27.9% of the total employed in 2017 are self-employed individuals, while unpaid family workers make up 6%.

Tourism industries provide entry points for women's employment and opportunities for creating self-employment in small- and medium-sized income-generating activities, thus creating paths towards the elimination of poverty of women and local communities in developing countries. Often, women use their existing skills to open small-scale businesses

such as guesthouses and restaurants (UNWTO, 2014)

Skills Learned in College. Companies look for specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and characteristics when they recruit, select, and hire their employees. These are all stated in the job specification portion of every position posted. The schools try to teach, train, and instill these skills and values in their students to make them more employable after graduation.

The International Labor Organization Dialogue Forum on New Development and Challenges in the Hospitality and Tourism sector looked at education and vocational training as key requisites for the operational effectiveness of the sector. Its workers tend to have limited professional qualifications, and a need for enhanced training and education, including health-related issues, has become visible. Participants agreed that motivated workers are the most talented employees – willing to stay with their company. Some of the soft skills needed, including language and communication skills, courtesy, discipline, conscientiousness, self-confidence, adaptability, creativity, and punctuality, can be enhanced through training (ILO, 2011).

Cognitive skills are the core skills that the brain uses to think, read, learn, remember, reason, and pay attention. Working together, taking incoming information and moving it into the bank of knowledge one uses every day at school, at work, and in life are all pertaining to the cognitive abilities of an individual. A lot of journal articles and research reports would support the claim that cognitive abilities are an important criterion for employee selection. It reflects a broader and deeper capability for comprehending our surroundings, “catching on”, “making sense of things, or “figuring out what to do” (Ones, Dilchert, & Viswesvaran, 2012).

In a workplace, communicating with one another is important for all levels. It is the exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols. Its main goal is to make the receiver understand the message as it was intended. Communication

skills needed by a potential employee are verbal or spoken communication which actually conveys personality and consideration for others (Nargunde, 2013). Having good communication skills enables an employee to interact and work together with his colleagues. This would lead to cooperation and coordination with the different individuals that are crucial to a specific work or task of the organization. Team leaders and managers need to be updated and to have real time, accurate information for decision-making.

Teamwork is promoted by organizations by requiring people to work together and communicate with one another. Ideally, interpersonal relationships should be productive, cooperative, and satisfying but in reality, though, this is not usually the case. Due to the natural makeup of people with different values and beliefs and where 2 or more individuals get together, it is likely that there may be disagreements which may result in conflicts. By traditional view, conflicts were considered avoidable, and the primary reason for conflicts was considered to be a failure of management. However, the modern view realizes that conflicts are inevitable and conflicts within levels may in fact result in improved organizational performance. Thus, an employee with good interpersonal skills would be able to work in a place despite these factors. Leadership is the process of influencing and supporting others to work enthusiastically toward achieving objectives. An individual with leadership skills is able to provide direction and vision towards a goal or objective. A leader is like a conductor of an orchestra wherein he/she guides the different workers into achieving a “harmony of melodies”. The role of a leader is oftentimes given to a manager or a supervisor. As a manager, the individual has to know how to plan, and organize the resources of the organization, direct his staff, monitor if all things are in order, and evaluate outputs to know if there needs to be changes or improvements.

Information Technology (IT) refers to any computer-based tool that people use to work with information and to support the

information-processing needs of an organization (Rainer et al., 2013), and the skill needed to operate and manage such tools is called "information technology skills." The modern environment is intensely competitive not only for organizations but for employees as well. For job seekers, one must compete with human talent from around the world. More than operating a computer or a tablet, employees should know how to send electronic mails, type memos and financial reports using word files or spreadsheets, prepare visual and audio-visual presentations, communicate via electronic chat rooms and voice communication, telecommuting, and many more. According to ILO's report, the speed of change is both disruptive and divisive. Disruptive because it intensifies competition. It requires organizations to be more responsive to their clients or employees. It is divisive for it places a distinct minority of the world – the wealthiest, best-educated ones- as the ones who can take advantage of these technologies. However, ILO also acknowledges that using new technology helps promote innovation and creativity.

Values Developed in College. According to Wolfgang Weinz, "the growing significance of technology and more demanding customers, as well as environmental issues, require a more effective customer-employee relationship. Competitiveness and productivity in the tourism industry depend on skill levels, professionalism, commitment, passion, loyalty, and soft skills of the workers." Furthermore, soft skills needed included language and communication skills, courtesy, discipline, adaptability, conscientiousness, self-confidence, creativity, and punctuality, and these skills can be enhanced through training if hired workers lack them (ILO, 2011).

For Notre Dame of Dadiangas University, its core values include family spirit, Marian, simplicity, love of work, the integrity of creation, presence, and participation, and quality education (NDDU, 2019). These values are in line with the values that the industry or employers are looking for.

The value of family spirit is NDDU's hope that the students, faculty, and staff would relate to and treat one another like members of a loving family, cooperating in making a good or better output. As a family, each member contributes to making each of their lives better and for operations to run smoothly. Love of work suggests having a commitment to the job assigned to an individual, whatever it may be. With this commitment comes hand-in-hand with punctuality and being reliable in his work. NDDU recognizes the dignity of work, as it may offer purpose in life and self-fulfillment, as well as contribute to the well-being of family, community, and nation. The graduates are also encouraged to continuously learn and be receptive to change. Through being present and participating, an NDDU graduate is able to give his best efforts to help fulfill the objectives and goals of the institution or organization of which he is a part.

Presence and participation mean being present at classes and activities and taking an active part, these are Marist ways of getting to know others. For schools, presence requires planning and preparation. It is a whole-school commitment to welcoming all students in the community. Policies, processes, and support are robust and inclusive enough to provide learning opportunities for all students, whatever their needs. The integrity of creation makes NDDU graduates aware of humans and all living and non-living matter created by God. Through this awareness, a Damean is able to utilize the resources given to him. He is able to see and respect people and living creatures around him. This implies being respectful as well as being efficient and resourceful. He becomes efficient because he is able to maximize his output with the resources entrusted to him. He becomes resourceful because if there is scarcity in his resources, he looks for alternatives so that his work may not be interrupted by such occurrences.

Being a graduate of a Marist school, the students are encouraged to live just as Mary did. Her life was lived in simplicity, being real in her relationships, transparent and honest. As organizations have responsibilities towards an

employee, the employee as well as responsibilities to the organization. Through complying with such responsibilities, both parties benefit because the social transactions between them produced new values that exceed the investment that each party makes. Graduates should always give back to society, even in their own little ways. In popular terms, Marist graduates are taught how to be socially responsible.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive type of research. It targeted the entire 186 BSTM graduates from the school year 2013–2019 as respondents of the study. Out of the total population, 147 graduates responded. The instrument used was a self-made questionnaire, in which questions were formulated from related literatures and research studies. The questionnaire was validated by experts. The data analysis tools used were frequency, percentage, and ranking.

RESULTS

In the profile of the graduates, 117 or 80% of the respondents were between 21–26 years old followed by more than 26 years old with 27 or 18.4% of the respondents while there were 2 or 1.4% with age less than 21 years old. As to their sex, 128 or 87.07% are female and 19 or 12.93% are male whereas 134 or 91.2% of them are single in civil status.

As to the professional development pursued after graduation, 112 respondents or 76%, did not pursue formal education. The non-pursuance of a non-formal education garnered the highest percentage, 70.7% or 104 respondents. Meanwhile, in terms of seminars and workshops attended, the top two highest results are Tour guiding and Front Office Services, with frequency of 98 and 83, respectively.

For the employment status, 92 of the respondents, or 62.4% are regular employees, and 98 of them, or 66.7% are holding a rank-and-file position. Furthermore, in terms of the nature of the company, hotels ranked highest

with 30 respondents or 24% followed by airline companies, 16 respondents or 12.7%. As to the length of employment, 98 graduates, or 66.67% have employment experience of 2 years and below. In the work engaged by those self-employed (23 respondents or 15.64%), ticketing (10 or 43.48%) and catering services (6 or 26.09%) are the top two answers.

In terms of the helpfulness of the skills learned at the University, results show that all skills were rated as very helpful by the BSTM graduates.

Table 1
Summary of Helpfulness of Skills Learned at the University

Skills learned	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Cognitive Skills	3.71	Very Helpful
Communication	3.70	Very Helpful
Interpersonal Skills	3.69	Very Helpful
Leadership Skills	3.60	Very Helpful
Information Technology Skills	3.53	Very Helpful

As for the values developed, the respondents also rated them as very helpful to their professional practice.

Table 2
Summary of Helpfulness of Developed Values to Professional Practice

Values Developed	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Family Spirit	3.83	Very Helpful
Simplicity	3.82	Very Helpful
Presence and participation	3.72	Very Helpful
Love of Work	3.80	Very Helpful
Integrity of creation	3.77	Very Helpful
Quality Education	3.80	Very Helpful

DISCUSSION

The Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM) program has been offered by the NDDU since 2009. This evaluation aims to assess the program's effectiveness in facilitating student learning, measure the

quality of education provided, and identify areas for curriculum improvement.

The evaluation found that the majority of BSTM graduates were between the ages of 21 and 26, female, and single. This aligns with the findings of Tourism HR Canada (2011), which reported that 30% of the tourism industry workforce falls within the 15-24 age range, with a concentration in the food and beverage sector. Additionally, the UNWTO's Global Report on Women and Tourism (2008) supports this trend, indicating that women comprise 54% of tourism industry employees in most regions worldwide. In addition, more than 70% of the graduates did not pursue further education after graduation. However, tour guiding (attended by 98 graduates) and front office services (attended by 83 graduates) were the most popular seminars attended by graduates.

In terms of employment status, 62.4% of graduates were found to be regular employees holding rank-and-file positions (66.7%) with a tenure of 2 years or less. This suggests that graduates were able to secure employment after graduation and maintain positions within the same company. As young professionals, their current positions are likely entry-level roles, with an average employment duration of around 2 years. Hotels and airlines were identified as the top employers for graduates, while those who opted for self-employment reported working in ticketing (43.48%) and catering services (26.09%).

Graduates rated cognitive, communication, leadership, interpersonal, and information technology skills as very helpful in their current positions. Additionally, the values of family spirit, simplicity, integrity of creation, presence and participation, love of work, and quality education were also rated as very helpful by the respondents.

The evaluation findings suggest that the BSTM program is successful in equipping graduates with the necessary skills and values for employment in the tourism industry. The high employment rate and positive graduate feedback on the program's relevance to their current positions are positive indicators.

However, the low rate of graduates pursuing further education suggests a potential area for program improvement. Consideration could be given to incorporating modules or resources that encourage graduates to continue their professional development.

Conclusion. Based on the findings of the study, it is therefore concluded that: the employability of graduates of any institution is a combination of the individual's physical, mental, psychomotor, and psychological attributes. The university provides avenues for their students through instruction and practice during their college days. A graduate may opt to engage in further studies or enhance his/her skills after graduation in a formal or non-formal setting. In whatever venture these individuals may find themselves in after graduation, universities and colleges must be committed to taking part in national development. The institution aims for its students to be aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to be given opportunities to participate in nation-building.

Recommendations. Based on the summary of findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are suggested.

Schools must add more skills-based subjects to their curriculum. These subjects like tour guiding, travel promotions, language courses, and others should be offered as electives for them to enhance the communication and interpersonal skills of the graduates. The administrators must provide more options for the internships of the students. The current 600 hours of on-the-job training required by the curriculum is enough time for exposure however, there are limited OJT venues and companies for the students to choose from.

Leadership skill is important for students to learn in the university. One way to help students gain this is to allow them to choose where and what (place and company) they would have their OJT's. Decision-making and being responsible for their application and their OJT requirements to be submitted in the specified period set by the university and its representatives would enhance the employability of the students.

Further, this research can be replicated with a focus on the other programs of the Business College or other colleges. Another study could be on the success and challenges of BS TM graduates turned entrepreneurs in General Santos City.

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