



FEEDBACK OF EMPLOYERS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF BA-HISTORY GRADUATES OF KASC

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Abstract: *The need to have skills and not just knowledge is an important qualification in any job description. There is a demand for higher levels of skills, frequent updating of skills and excellent 'soft skills' as well as technical skills. The Higher Education Institutions (Universities and Colleges) 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. Students, employers and government bodies expect that undergraduate university degrees will equip students, not only with the specific knowledge, skills and attributes of their field, but also with the professional and personal attributes relevant to their field of study. This descriptive study surveyed the feedback of employers on the performance AB History graduates using a self-administered questionnaire to gather data needed. The data collected were carefully tabulated, organized, analyzed and interpreted using frequency and percentages. Weighted Mean was used to describe the levels of performance of the AB History graduates. The study determined that the performance of the AB History graduates as assessed by the employers 'Sometimes exceeds the employers' required standard'. The employers also rated the attributes as much important. The research findings showed that the employers involved in this survey are very much satisfied of the AB History graduates attached to their organizations. The findings are useful as reflective tools on curriculum design.*

Keywords: *Employer Feedback/ Graduate Attributes*

*Kalinga- Apayao State College



INTRODUCTION

The need to have skills and not just knowledge is an important qualification in any job description. There is a demand for higher levels of skills, frequent updating of skills and excellent 'soft skills' as well as technical skills. Numerous surveys showed that over 90 per cent of 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).

The Higher Education Institutions (Universities and Colleges) 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. There have been concerns raised by employers that they are not able to find graduates with the required skills (Hesketh (2000), DOLE Annual report, 2013).

The Philippines needs an education system that is market-driven in order to produce 'work ready graduates'. The focus towards producing a 'work-ready graduates' should be on graduate attributes geared towards empowering graduates to thrive in the 21st century workplace and to function as productive and responsible citizens. In a knowledge-based economy, graduates must bring more than technical knowledge to the job. According to the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) the primary purpose of higher education is to prepare students for the world of work. Graduates need to be given opportunities to develop generic attributes besides disciplinary knowledge. Generic attributes include communication skills, problem-solving skills, computer literacy, information literacy, ability and willingness to learn, and teamwork (Scoufis, 2000).

A degree alone is not enough to succeed in today's competitive job market. In a survey reported by the BBC, four out of 10 large employers in the United Kingdom struggled to fill graduate vacancies because of a shortage of applicants with the right skills. Another study done by Monash University in Australia, showed that more than one-third of foreign students graduated from Australian universities had very poor English skills (The Malay Mail, 2007). According to the study, all graduates tested had enough command of the language to cope with most situations but were still not capable of conducting a sophisticated discourse at a professional level. The study reported that 23.5% of students from the Philippines did not meet the required English standard.



Many universities nowadays, have adopted an outward-looking approach, and work closely with industries and employers. The Australia-based universities (Griffith University, University of Canberra, University of South Australia, and Curtin University of Technology) and the UK based universities such as, University of Leeds, University of Leicester and University of Texas and University of Pittsburgh in the United States have identified specific generic competencies that graduates should develop to enhance their employability. Similarly, National University of Singapore's Business School is also providing a rigorous, relevant and rewarding business education that develops leaders for the global marketplace. Graduate employability is no doubt a central concern of contemporary higher education (Treleaven & Voola 2008). Indeed numerous studies have proven that employability requires the development of graduates' attributes (Alexander 2006; Hoban et al 2004; Kember & Leung 2005, cited in Treleaven & Voola 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graduate employability is an important aspect of higher education industry. It evaluates the success and ability of the particular institution in producing work ready graduates. Employability has been used as a performance indicator for higher education institutions (Smith et al, 2000). Harvey (2001) has defined employability in various ways from individual and institutional perspectives. Individual employability is defined as graduates being able to demonstrate the attributes to obtain jobs. Commonly, institutional employability relates to the employment rates of the university graduates. Prior to this, Harvey and Howard (1999) cited in Treleavan and Voola (2008) suggested that graduates' success in their jobs depends more on graduates attributes than on narrow discipline specific degrees. Furthermore, Barrie (2004) indicates that the generic graduate attributes will directly relate the graduate outcomes to the employability.

Graduate attributes as defined by the higher Education Council Australia (1992) report *Achieving Quality* as "the skills, personal attributes and values which should be acquired by all graduates, regardless of their discipline or field of study. In other words, they should represent the central achievement of higher education as a process".

In the previous research on graduate attributes based on employers perspectives, Knoblauch and German (1989) outlined few most highly sought after attributes for Cornell University graduates in Applied Economics and Business Management. The attributes were



enthusiasm, self-starting ability, general ability, working with others, oral communication and preparedness for the job. Sparks and Bradley (1994) also discovered that employers from hospitality industry places greater emphasis upon the graduates' practical skills, level of commitment and ability to deliver high levels of service. Nevertheless, in Clarke's (1997) study based on 40 chief executives or managing directors from manufacturing and services industries concluded that employers are actually looking for the graduates who possess attributes of long life learning, flexibility and adaptability to changes as well as some generic skills of communication, teamwork, initiative, problem solving and decision making.

In a recent research conducted at University Technology of Sydney, Nettleton (2007) interviewed the professional accrediting societies of Business and Information Technology to find out on work-ready graduate attributes. The nine professional accrediting societies highlighted five most important attributes: application of knowledge, communication skills, critical thinking and creative problem-solving, global perspectives and teamwork.

Besides studies from overseas supported that graduates generic attributes are required in the job market, the local studies also conclude that the local graduates must have generic attributes to acquire jobs in the Philippines. This is proven by an earlier press release by the manufacturing and service sectors expressing the view that most employers were unfavourably inclined to employ graduates who did not have generic attributes (Philippine Daily Inquirer, Oct.1, 2011, cited in Cruz 2005). In another study (Quek 2005) conducted on a group of employers in Malaysia, it was reported that the employers expressed the importance of interpersonal skills, knowledge-acquiring skills, flexibility, value-improving skill, practical orientation abilities and cognitive skills as major contributors toward success in work performance. With all these attributes, AB History graduates will be more able to transfer learning from the classrooms to the workplace for success in work performance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Universities must initiate to integrate basic generic attributes which are required by the employers and incorporate effectively in the course work to produce work-ready graduates. For example, Curtin University of Technology, Curtin Business School (CBS) undertook a Professional skills Project to compile feedback from representatives from 7 disciplines, employers, students, the Centre for Educational Advancement (CEA), and the library to identify seven professional skills and develop them in the form of learning outcome



objectives : communication (divided into writing, presenting and speaking out), computer literacy, information literacy, team working, decision making, critical thinking including problem-solving, and ethical and inter-cultural dimensions (Harpe et al 2000).

In the ideal world, schools—be they universities, colleges or technical/ vocational training institutions—would be in regular contact and close coordination with the potential employers of their graduates, well-guided on the nature and content of their course offerings in order to be most responsive to the needs of the firms. There is great scope for strengthening linkages between industry and academe to foster more relevant course and curriculum design: university-based research agenda, faculty enrichment through industrial immersion, scholarship programs, and other modes for helping the schools address the gaps in the learning process of graduates. The feedback of employers on the performance of graduates is a good measure of determining the responsiveness and relevance of any program curriculum hence, this study.

OBJECTIVES

This undertaking aimed to obtain the feedback of employers on the performance of AB History graduates from 2007 to 2012. The specific objectives of the study are

1) To find out the degree to which AB History graduates of KASC have demonstrated performance attributes in the workforce, and 2) to determine the attributes that are significantly valued by their employers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The descriptive study looked into feedback of employers on the performance of AB History graduates in order to come up with recommendations to improve the History curriculum. Target companies/organizations are those that have employed the AB History sub-degree graduates of the Kalinga-Apayao State College. The respondents of the survey are the immediate supervisors of the graduates or staff at senior level who have knowledge of the performance of the graduates. Local agencies were personally contacted by the researchers while agencies outside the area were contacted through calls and e-mail correspondence to explain the purpose of the survey and to identify a contact person to coordinate the survey. Contact persons were usually the Personnel Managers or Human Resource Managers. Copies of the questionnaires, together with a letter from the Dean of the Institute and a general guideline for completing the questionnaire, were sent to the contact



persons. Completed questionnaires were returned by mail using the pre-paid self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, the respondents could e-mail the questionnaires to an identified address. Constant follow-up and field visits were made to contact persons/immediate supervisors who did not return the questionnaires.

Data Resources and Analysis

The present survey covered AB History graduates from 2007 to 2012 working on either a full or part-time basis as of December 2012. The remaining respondents who are either self-employed or unemployed were considered irrelevant to this Survey.

Among the 61 working graduates, 32 were employed by the Government. The remaining 29 graduates were working full-time in companies/organizations in the non-Government sector. Records of these graduates were used as the sampling frame.

Data were collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire. For each attribute, respondents were requested to give their assessment on the performance of the graduates and their views on the importance of the attributes for the post held by the graduates. Their assessments were indicated by a score on a 5-point scale as follows:

Value	Limits	Performance	Importance
5	4.21-5.00	Always exceeds the employers' required standard	Highly Important
4	3.41-4.20	Sometimes exceeds employers' required standard	Much Important
3	2.61-3.40	Generally meets the employers' required standard	Moderately Important
2	1.81-2.60	Sometimes fails to meet the employers' required standard	Less Important
1	1.00-1.80	Always fails to meet employers' required standard	Not Important

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Performance of AB History Graduates and importance of the attributes

Table 1 – Performance Score with respect to the Attributes

Performance Attributes	Performance Score	Importance Score
1. COMMUNICATION SKILLS	3.66	3.98
Ability to write communication effectively	3.85	3.79
Ability to express ideas clearly	3.95	4.22
Ability to comprehend written instructions	3.34	3.92
Ability to comprehend verbal instructions	3.49	3.98
2. NUMERICAL COMPETENCY	3.47	3.76
Comprehension of data	3.50	3.79
Application of data	3.43	3.73
3. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY LITERACY	3.65	3.78
Use of standard computer software	3.70	3.93



Adaptability to new software	3.56	3.69
Ability to make use of the Internet & Intranet to facilitate work & business	3.72	3.73
Locate, gather & organize information using appropriate technology and information systems	3.63	3.77
4. ANALYTICAL AND PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES	3.19	3.87
Ability in applying knowledge, principles and concepts in the work place.	3.44	4.01
Ability to think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives.	3.05	3.79
Ability to apply logical and rational processes to analyze the problems.	3.20	3.92
Ability to synthesize and evaluate information gathered	3.20	4.04
Ability to think creatively to generate solutions	3.11	3.59
Ability to implement solution and act on opportunities for improvement	3.18	3.82
Ability to understand and apply a range of strategies to solve problems	3.13	3.91
5. WORK ATTITUDE	3.53	4.22
Sense of responsibility and commitment	3.68	4.41
Ability to work independently	3.54	4.20
Perseverance	3.52	4.24
Initiative and drive	3.37	4.21
Receptivity and adaptability to new ideas and environment	3.44	4.01
Ability to demonstrate ethical practices	3.64	4.30
6. INTER-PERSONAL SKILLS	3.47	4.08
Inter-personal relationship	3.65	4.14
Ability to work in team	3.70	4.25
Ability to sustain intellectual curiosity.	3.36	4.02
Ability to appreciate and understand individual differences	3.43	4.06
Able to accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner	3.29	3.91
7. RECORDSKEEPING SKILLS	3.94	3.87
Observes Procedures	3.95	3.65
Able to organize files	3.67	4.52
Ability to access information by using appropriate channels and resources	4.21	3.43
8. MANAGEMENT SKILLS	3.12	3.29
Organization of work	3.28	3.81
Able to manage and resolve conflict when appropriate	3.04	2.97
Ability to demonstrate leadership skills.	2.98	3.03
Able to motivate team-members	2.89	3.22
Management of available resources and ability to seek resources and assistance	3.20	3.44
Ability to deliver ideas/solutions to colleagues	3.31	3.25



9. TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE JOB	3.31	3.65
Technical knowledge	3.33	3.76
Ability to handle technical demands in work	3.31	3.74
Ability to solve technical problems	3.22	3.67
Ability to select and use appropriate tools and technology for a task or project	3.23	3.61
Able to work to agreed quality standards and specification	3.30	3.74
Aware of occupational health and safety practices and procedures, and act in accordance with these	3.37	3.65
Ability to apply international standards and practices within a discipline or professional area.	3.42	3.37
TAWM	3.48	3.83

The overall performance of the AB History graduates as assessed by the employers 'Sometimes exceeds the employers' required standard', with a TAWM of 3.48. On the other hand, the employers rated the attributes as much important with a TAWM of 3.83.

The performance of AB history graduates are rated as above average in 47% or 21 of the performance attributes. The graduates were perceived to 'generally meet the employers' required standard' in 50% or 22 of the performance attributes with ability to motivate team members obtaining the lowest mean of 2.89. Remarkably, the graduates are seen to 'always exceed the employers' required standard' along 'Ability to access information by using appropriate channels and resources' as shown by the mean of 4.21.

In comparison, able to organize files (4.52) was the most important attribute, whereas able to manage and resolve conflict when appropriate was perceived as the least important attribute (2.97).

Table 2 – Summary of Performance and Importance Scores along the 9 Aspects of Performance

Performance Aspects	Performance Score	Importance Score
English Language Proficiency	3.66	3.98
Numerical Competency	3.47	3.76
Information Technology Literacy	3.65	3.78
Analytical and Problem-Solving Abilities	3.19	3.87
Work Attitude	3.53	4.22
Inter-personal Skills	3.47	4.08
Records keeping Skills	3.94	3.87
Management Skills	3.12	3.29
Technical Skills Required for the Job	3.31	3.65
TAWM	3.48	3.83



The performance scores of the 9 major aspects is 3.48, implying that the graduates were able to perform better than required standard. However, graduates' performance varied among different aspects, with the lowest score of 3.12 for Management Skills while the highest score of 3.66 for communication skills.

Regarding the importance of these aspects, employers generally perceived all aspects were of above average in importance, except for Management Skills which received the lowest score of 3.29 which falls under the 'Moderately Important' description. Work Attitude obtained the highest score of 4.22, implying that employers consider Sense of responsibility and commitment, Ability to work independently, Perseverance, Initiative and drive, Receptivity and adaptability to new ideas and environment and Ability to demonstrate ethical practices as attributes that are 'highly important' in the workplace.

There is enthusiasm that the graduates showed when they used technology in their work. This is true as most of their learning process is engaged with the use of technologies such as online materials, online journals, blackboards and whiteboards in their learning. The engagement that they had with technology at the State College has managed to get them to be fast learner at the workplace. The nature of the History curriculum, which put greater emphasis on project-based assessment, has also equipped them with teambuilding skills. This is shown in the survey that the graduates are able to adapt easily working as a team. However, there are few areas where the graduates are not able to perform to the employers' expectations. Skills like critical skills, problem-solving skills, and ability to apply discipline knowledge and concepts in the workplace are seen as the critical area that needs attention. These areas have to be put forth in the revision of the History curriculum at the Kalinga-Apayao State College.

The importance scores and the corresponding performance scores for the 44 attributes were plotted on a two-dimensional graph below. It can be seen that there is a positive relationship between the two scores. For attributes considered as relatively more important, the graduates generally received a relatively high rating in their performance score.

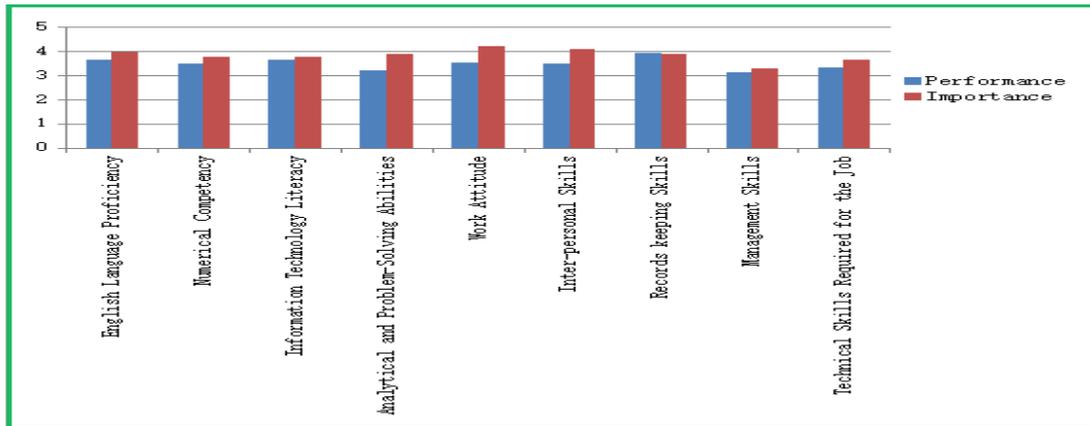


Fig. 1. Performance of AB History graduates and Importance Scores of Attributes

Table 2 – Satisfaction of Employers with Overall Performance AB History Graduates

Overall Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Very Much Satisfied	16	26.23
Much Satisfied	27	44.26
Moderately Satisfied	13	21.31
Less satisfied	3	4.92
Not Satisfied	2	3.28
Total	61	100%

It is shown that 44.26 % of employers are ‘much satisfied’ with the performance of AB History graduates confirming the above average performance of the graduates as shown in the previous tables. 26% or 16 of the employers are very much satisfied with performance while only 3.28% or 2 of the employer respondents are not satisfied. Implying that only 2 of the graduates failed to meet employers’ required standard.

CONCLUSION

1. The research findings showed that the BA History graduates were able to perform better than required standard.
2. The employers involved in this survey are very much satisfied of the BA History graduates attached to their organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the curriculum emphasizes opportunities to engage critical thinking processes and critical reflection in class and online. The range of learning activities and assessment tasks that provide a learning platform for history students



should be re-assessed to make sure that the skills are transferable. Skills like critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills, and application skills should be emphasized at the first year level.

2. The curriculum mapping that has been practiced in designing the curriculum could be used as a benchmark to map the learning outcomes and making sure that there is no gap in the graduates learning process. This will help the graduates to understand what is needed from them to enable them to better present themselves when they enter the workforce.
3. Involving employers on curriculum development and arranging internship programs would enhance the relevance and quality of degree programs.
4. It is also suggested that attachments to training programs in large companies/ organizations should be arranged for graduates so that they can gain work experience.

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