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Assessing Employability: Tracing BA Sociology Graduates from MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the employability of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology graduates from MSU-Iligan Institute of Technology, focusing on their demographic profile and employment characteristics. Using the Input, Process, Output (IPO) model and a sample of 153 graduates from 2016 to 2021, the research found that the majority of participants were female, with 78% employed primarily in government, private sectors, and NGOs, earning between 10,000 and 14,999 pesos monthly. Most graduates secured their first job within a year and found their degree relevant to their roles. Key skills such as work ethics, teamwork, verbal communication, and interpersonal skills were highlighted as valuable in the workplace. The study also noted high satisfaction with the program's faculty, curriculum, facilities, and library resources, affirming the curriculum's relevance and competitiveness in the job market. Recommendations included enhancing internships, immersive activities, and faculty-student relations. However, the findings may not fully capture current job market conditions. Future research could investigate graduates' job satisfaction, the perceived relevance of their education, and their lived experiences in the workforce.

KEYWORDS

BA Sociology;
employability
tracer study;
graduates; state
university

INTRODUCTION

Graduate Tracer Studies (GTS) are increasingly being adopted as a widely recognized practice globally. These studies involve tracking and maintaining contact with graduates from higher education institutions (HEIs), driven by the importance of understanding how graduates perceive their educational experiences and navigate the transition into the job market (Badiro and Wahome 2016).

According to Schomburg (2016), the outcomes of graduate tracer studies are significant for analyzing the connection between higher education and the workforce. Furthermore, Abelha et al. (2020) and Cuadra et al. (2019) highlights that these studies offer valuable quantitative data on employment and career paths, the nature of work and the associated competencies, as well as insights into the professional orientation and experiences of graduates. The data obtained through these studies serves as a crucial indicator of the quality of higher education.

As part of the criteria for designating a degree program as a center of excellence or center of development, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines has made it mandatory for higher education institutions (HEIs) to conduct tracer studies (CHED Memorandum Order #46 Series of 2012). Tracer studies are also included as a documentary requirement by accrediting bodies such as the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP), Inc. These studies provide valuable data that can be used to assess and reassess the factors influencing and contributing to the employment status of graduates.

As of January 2023, the Philippines experienced an unemployment rate of 4.8%, (PSA 2023). In 2020, among the unemployed, individuals aged 15 to 24 accounted for 42.4%, while those aged 25 to 34 comprised 32.1%. In terms of educational attainment, 26.9% of the unemployed were college graduates, 10.0% were college undergraduates, and 28.7% had completed junior high school (PSA 2020). Both the Philippine and global labor markets have become highly competitive. Therefore, when parents consider which universities and colleges their children should attend to obtain a degree, the potential for future employment holds significant importance (Abuso 2018). Consequently, schools place great emphasis on employability when formulating their curriculum and establishing policies related to recruitment, admissions, and student retention.

Tracer studies were conducted on graduates of the Department of Sociology, College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS), MSU-IIT, focusing on BA Sociology alumni from two different periods: 2000-2011 and 2012-2015 (Ponce et al. 2013; Ponce et al. 2017). The findings from these studies revealed that a majority of the surveyed alumni perceived a strong connection between their undergraduate coursework and their current employment. The employability rate was found to be high for both their initial and current jobs. The top five job sectors where the alumni were employed included teaching, HR/administration, BPO/call center/sales, public relations officer roles, and consultancy/managerial positions. The academic preparation provided during their undergraduate studies played a significant role in their current employment. The alumni expressed that the curriculum was relevant and

beneficial to their work. Furthermore, there was a noticeable alignment or congruence between the skills they acquired through their education and those sought after by employers.

The Department of Sociology conducted a tracer study in 2021, focusing on its graduates from 2016-2021. The purpose of the study is to get feedback from the former students on their current employment, a perspective of their education at the university, what they feel should be done to improve courses and how prepared they were for the job market.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to identify the factors regarding the employability of the graduates of BA Sociology program from 2016-2021. In particular, the following are the specific objectives of the study:

- To describe the profile of BA Sociology alumni;
- To describe the employment history/ work experience of the graduates;
- To determine the relevance of the courses with their professional work;
- To identify curricular development implications of the data generated.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study made use of the systems analysis perspective of input-process-output (IPO) model by Harald Schomburg (2016). The framework is based on classic systems theory, which states that the general structure of a system is as important in determining how effectively it will function as its individual components. Similarly, the IPO model has a causal structure, in that outputs are a function of various group processes, which are in turn influenced by numerous input variables. In this study, input is the curriculum content of the BA Sociology program, whereas processes are the interactions in the teaching and learning strategies to produce outputs. Outputs are the knowledge, skills and competencies learned by the graduates. These three stages produced outcomes which can be gauged after graduation. The outcomes are measured in the transition of the graduates to duration of their job search and getting their first job. This also includes their current employment (see Figure 1). There is however variation in the basic IPO model that incorporates dynamic change where feedback loops were added to the original IPO model, emanating primarily from outcomes and feeding back to inputs or processes (Igen et al. 2005).

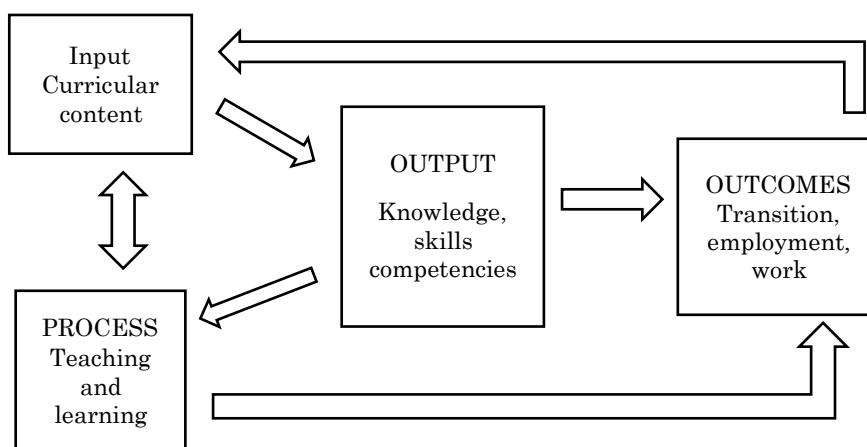


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is descriptive which utilized a modified CHED Graduate Tracer Study questionnaire to gather the primary data. There 153 respondents from the graduates from 2016 to 2021 included in the study. The study used volunteer sampling for those who answered the Google survey form forwarded to the alumni through their personal Facebook messenger or through the official Facebook page of the Department of Sociology, College of Arts and Social Sciences of the Mindanao State University - Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) located in Iligan City of Lanao del Norte, Philippines. The participation rate of the graduates as shown in the table below showed that there is a 55.43% participation from all graduates from 2016-2021.

Table 1. Number of BA Sociology graduates and sample size by year

Year	Number of graduates	Sample	% of the graduates sampled
2016	37	23	62.0
2017	49	26	53.0
2018	117	31	26.4
2019	69	69	100.0
2020	2	2	100.0
2021	2	2	100.0
Total	276	153	55.43

The data gathering instrument used was a 31 item questionnaire that asked about their employment history, competencies/employability skills, their assessment of the curriculum and recommendations to enhance the curricular content of the program. The perceived strength of the program was rated using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest rating. The fiduciary limits and interpretation were:

1.0 - 1.80	Very Low
1.81 - 2.60	Low
2.61 - 3.40	Average
3.41 - 4.20	High
4.21 - 5.00	Very High

Data gathered from the questionnaire were processed using Excel. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Open ended data were coded and analyzed using content and thematic analysis according to the themes that surfaced.

2.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were put in place during the conduct of this study. Online research participants were volunteers who filled up the questionnaire out of their own volition. The respondents also signed the

informed consent form that vouched for the voluntary nature of their participation. The research also ensured the anonymity of the identity and information revealed will only be used for the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the respondents' personal characteristics (year graduated and sex), their employment history, relevance of the curriculum in college, and implication for curriculum enhancement.

3.1 Profile of Alumni Respondents

3.1.1 Year graduated in the BA Sociology Program and Sex

This tracer study focused on the graduates from 2016 to 2021. There was a total of 276 graduates during this period and the study traced 153 or 55.43% of the alumni. The biggest bulk of the alumni respondents are those who graduated in 2019 with 100% of the graduates answering the survey. Additionally, all of the graduates in 2020 and 2021 also accomplished the questionnaire.

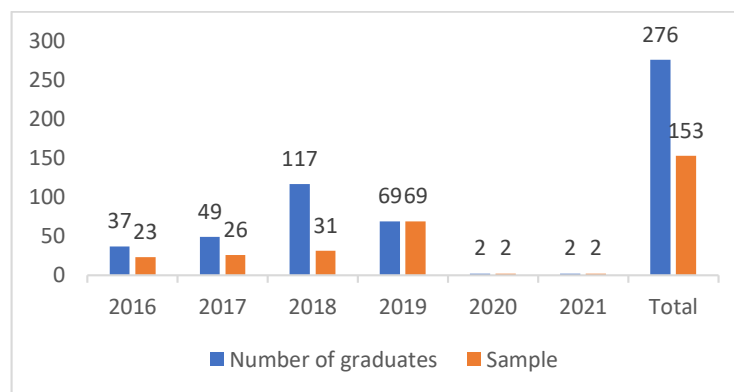


Figure 2. Chart of the respondent's year graduated

According to the data, 80% of the graduates are female and 20% are male, highlighting a predominance of women in the program. This trend aligns with findings from other tracer studies (Dela Cruz et al. 2024; Pentang et al. 2022; Cuadra 2019), which also report a higher number of female graduates compared to their male counterparts.

3.2 Employment History/ Work Experience

3.2.1 Duration of Job Search in Getting Their First Job

The table below illustrates the data when the respondents secured employment. This data is crucial for assessing the immediate employability of graduates and the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for quick entry into the job market. There are 60 or 43.80% of the respondents who were employed within one to three months after their graduation. This suggests that there is a strong alignment between their skills and employer demands. Interestingly, 13.87% got their first job less than a month after graduation. There were also those that were employed on their first job from 4-6 months (16.06%), 7 - 9 months (8.03%), 10 months up to one year (13.14%), and a few years after (5.11%). Findings in this study also collaborate with other research which shows that many graduates find jobs within 6 months to 1 year after graduation (Albina and Sumagaysay, 2020; Sagarino et al., 2018; Sanchez and Diamante, 2017).

Table 2. Duration of First Job Search

Month/s after they land their first job	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a month	19	13.87
1 - 3 months	60	43.80
4 - 6 months	22	16.06
7 - 9 months	11	8.03
10 - 12 months	18	13.14
13 months and up	7	5.11
N/A	16	10.45
Total:	153	100.0

3.2.2 Nature of First Job

Table 3 shows how the graduates started their careers. This data is significant for understanding the entry-level positions that graduates commonly secure and assessing how well the program prepares the students for these initial jobs. The top three first job of the BA Sociology graduates as shown in Table 3 are clerical support work with 25.49%, freelance and online jobs with 16.34%, and professionals with 15.03%. The rest of the respondents worked in research/ project related work (8.50%), service and sales work (7.84%), and managers (7.84%). It is interesting to note that there are already managers among the graduates of the program from 2016 or within five years.

The data show that some of the graduates began their careers in clerical support roles while a few immediately entered professional roles. However, there is a growing trend of non-traditional employment among graduates. This reflects the program's adaptability to emerging job markets and the need for skills that support diverse employment opportunities. In addition, respondents also secured research or project-related positions which reflects the applicability of the program's research training and its relevance in various sectors. Notable are graduates in managerial positions within just five

years which highlights the program's potential for fostering leadership and management skills. This is also similar to other studies where majority of alumni secure employment related to their field of study, with some variations across disciplines (Albina and Sumagaysay, 2020; Sanchez and Diamante, 2017).

Table 3. Nature of First Job

First Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Clerical Support Workers	39	25.49
Freelance, Online Jobs	25	16.34
Professionals	23	15.03
Research/Project - related	13	8.50
Service and sales workers	12	7.84
Managers	7	4.58
N/A (Unemployed)	34	22.22
Total:	153	100.00

3.2.3 Number of Respondents Presently Employed

Table 4 reveals the current employment of the respondents. This data is crucial for assessing the overall success of the program in facilitating job placement and highlights the effectiveness of the education provided in leading to employment. The majority of respondents, representing 78%, are currently employed.

The high employment rate highlights a generally positive employment outcome for graduates. Employment and work are considered as outcomes of the process of getting a degree. As can be observed in the data, majority of the respondents are employed which may indicate a high level of effectiveness of the BA Sociology program. This further suggests that the program is effective in preparing students for the job market. This indicates that the curriculum, skills taught, and overall educational experience align well with the needs of employers and the demands of the job market. This relevance could be a result of the program's focus on practical skills, critical thinking, and an understanding of social dynamics, which are applicable in various professional settings.

However, the 22% of respondents who are not employed underscores a significant proportion of graduates facing challenges in the job market. This disparity invites further investigation into potential factors contributing to the employment gap, such as industry demand, the alignment of skills with job requirements, and economic conditions.

The most common reasons for not being employed are: still trying to find employment (41.17%), taking advanced studies (29.41%), and pregnancy/family (5.88%). As can be gleaned from the data, there is a high employment rate among the BA Sociology graduates considering that in Northern Mindanao the unemployment rate is 11.1% in April 2020 (PSA 2020).

Table 4. Reasons for Unemployment

Reasons for Unemployment	Frequency	Percentage
Still trying to find work	14	41.17
Taking advanced studies/second course	10	29.41
Pregnancy/Family	2	5.88
Total:	34	100.0

3.2.4 Present Occupation

Table 5 shows the extent to which the BA Sociology program prepares graduates for advanced and specialized career goals, reflecting the program's success in facilitating entry into professional, administrative, technical, research, and flexible positions. The top three current jobs of the respondents are professionals (34.45%), clerical support workers (17.65%), technicians and associate professionals (11.76%) and service and sales workers (11.76%). There are also 10.92% who are working in online jobs as call center agents and virtual assistants. Other respondents are working in research/project related work (8.40%), managers (2.52%), and self-employed or managing their own family's business (2.52%).

High employment rates are valuable, but it's also crucial to assess the nature and quality of the jobs graduates secure. While most respondents initially held clerical support roles, they have since advanced to professional positions. Additionally, new job types such as technicians, support professionals, and self-employed individuals have emerged, highlighting the broader range of occupations graduates now hold compared to their first jobs.

The shift in graduates' occupations—from clerical roles to professional positions, as well as new roles like technicians, support professionals, and self-employed individuals—has significant implications (O'Leary et al., 2017; Behle et al., 2015). This transition suggests that graduates are experiencing career growth and acquiring a broad range of skills applicable across various fields. It indicates that the program effectively prepares students to leverage their degrees in diverse sectors, enhancing their employability. Additionally, the emergence of new job types highlights the need for curriculum updates to align with industry trends, potentially incorporating elements that support entrepreneurship, technical skills, and managerial competencies.

Table 5. Present occupation of respondents

Present Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Professionals	41	34.45
Clerical Support Workers	21	17.65
Technicians and associate professionals	14	11.76
Service and sales workers	14	11.76
Online Jobs (Call center agent, virtual assistant)	13	10.92
Research/Project - related	10	8.40
Managers	3	2.52
Self-employed/managing family business	3	2.52
Total:	119	100.0

3.2.5 Present Employment Status

Table 6 indicates how respondents are employed as regular or permanent employees which is crucial in reflecting the effectiveness of the program in securing long-term and stable job placements for its alumni. In terms of the employment status of the alumni respondents, majority or 43.70% are regular/permanent employees. On the other hand, 33.61% are on a contractual basis and 10.08% are casual employees. The rest of the alumni respondents are self-employed which comprise 12.61%.

Table 6. Present employment status

Classification of Employment	Frequency	Percentage
Regular/Permanent	52	43.70
Contractual	40	33.61
Self-employed	15	12.61
Casual	12	10.08
Total	119	100.0

3.2.6 Employing Agency

Table 7 reflects the different sectors where the respondents are employed in. This will provide insights into which sector absorbs the program's alumni and the job market trends of the graduates. Most of the employing agencies of the alumni respondents are private institutions comprising 54.62%.

This is followed by government institutions comprising 41.18% and NGOs with 4.20%.

For the private institutions employing the alumni respondents, these includes various industries and commercial firms such as Robinsons Retail Holdings, Inc., Super 5 Transport, MORESCO -1, Mercury Drug Corporation, Watsons, Cebu Pacific, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Hinduja Global Solutions, Petron Corporation, PHINMA Cagayan de Oro, Gerona Construction, and various private online companies such as Concentrix, 51 Talk, Teleperformance, Conduent, Onlinejobs.ph, ACADSOC, Accenture, Wiltwyck Web Design and others.

For the government institutions, these includes various LGUs, colleges and universities, DILG, DOLE, DSWD, CHED, DepEd, PSA, Municipal Trial Court, BARMM, Coast Guard and others. For the NGO, these includes Plan International, Pakigdait, Inc., RMS Collect Phil and PSS.

Table 7. Classification of employment

Classification of Employment	Frequency	Percentage
Government	49	41.18
Private	65	54.62
NGO	5	4.20
Total	119	100.0

3.2.7 Job Search Strategies for Current Work

Table 8 reveals the information about which strategy was used by the respondents to search for a job. The method of how the alumni respondents obtained information about job vacancies and how they obtained their current job show that referrals/information from friends and family account for 42.86%. The data shows that through referrals or information from friends and family, personal networks has an impact on job acquisition. This is followed by online advertisements comprising 21.85%, which shows the effectiveness of digital job platforms and advertisements in the job search process.

In addition, the respondents also applied directly for jobs at the company which comprise 15.13%. This strategy shows the proactive approach to job searching. It reflects the level of initiative taken by graduates in securing employment. The mentors/former faculty vouching for the respondents is also one method for 14.29% of the respondents. Professional recommendations and mentorship in the job search process illustrate the influence of academic and professional networks on employment outcomes. Some of the respondents also made use of job fairs (1.68%) and others own the family business they are working for (1.68%). In other tracer studies, job search methods often involved personal connections and recommendations (Sagarino et al., 2018).

Table 8. How current job was obtained

How did you get your present job?	Frequency	Percentage
Referrals/information from friends/family	51	42.86
Online Ads	26	21.85
Approach employer directly/ Job application	18	15.13
Referrals/information from mentors/former faculty	17	14.29
Through job fair	5	4.20
Family-owned business	2	1.68
Total	119	100.0

Looking at the transitional period between graduation and employment, by examining the graduates duration of job search, first job and employment status, there is a high level of effectivity of the BA Sociology program. In general, the alumni respondents were able to obtain their first job in less than three months.

3.2.8 Current Household Monthly Income

In terms of household monthly income, 20.26% of the respondents earn between 10, 000 - 14, 999 per month. This is followed by those earning below 5, 000 per month. It must be considered that in the Philippines in 2018, the monthly poverty threshold for a family of five is an average income of P10, 481 per month. This amount is enough to cover a single family's basic food and non-food needs. Poverty threshold refers to the minimum income a family or individual must earn in order to be considered "not poor". Food threshold in 2018 means that a family of five needed no less than P 7,337, on average, to meet the family's basic food needs for a month (PSA 2018). With this, those earning below 10, 000 among the respondents is 52 respondents or 33.96% of the respondents. There are however, 30 respondents or 19.6% respondents who are earning from 25, 000 and above.

Table 9. Respondents' current monthly household income

Monthly Income in Present Job	Frequency	Percentage
Below 5000	27	17.65
5,0001 - 9,999	25	16.34
10,000 - 14,999	31	20.26
15,000 - 19,999	26	16.99
20,000 - 29,999	14	9.15
25,000 - 29,999	15	9.80
30,000 and above	15	9.80
Total:	153	100.0

3.3 Usefulness of the Course Curriculum for Professional Work

3.3.1 Relevance of Degree to Job

A significant portion of respondents, 56%, reported that their BA Sociology degree is relevant to their current jobs, indicating that the degree equips them with valuable skills applicable to their professional roles. The degree's relevance to their jobs suggests that the educational curriculum effectively prepares graduates for roles that require these competencies.

The perceived relevance of the degree could also explain why 73.73% of graduates secured employment within six months of graduation. The alignment between academic training and job requirements likely enhances graduates' employability, allowing them to enter the workforce swiftly and effectively. Additionally, the skills developed through the Sociology program may make graduates more attractive to employers who seek individuals with strong analytical, communicative, and problem-solving abilities.

Graduates generally perceive their college education as relevant to their employment, citing curriculum, competencies, and values as influential factors (Albina & Sumagaysay, 2020; Sagarino et al., 2018; Sanchez & Diamante, 2017). In addition, engineering graduates in one study perceived community extension, linkages, and research as highly relevant to their job placement, followed by student services and faculty instruction (Chavez et al., 2016).

3.3.2 Competencies and Skills Acquired

Table 10 reflects the competencies and skills that the graduates learned in college and which were very useful to their job. The top 5 competencies and skills were work ethic, teamwork, verbal skills, interpersonal skills, and organizing skills. This also supports the reasons for landing a job six months after graduation. Similarly, Sagarino et al. (2018) and Baird and Parayitam (2019) stated that employers value graduates' teamwork abilities, relational skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and positive attitudes.

Table 10. Skills acquired by the graduates in college

Skills/Competencies	Frequency	Percentage
Work Ethic	132	9.95
Teamwork Skills	106	7.99
Verbal Skills	105	7.92
Interpersonal Skills	104	7.84
Organizing Skills	104	7.84
Decision-making Skills	99	7.47
Initiative and Enthusiasm	99	7.47
Written Skills	91	6.86
Analytical and Critical Skills	85	6.41
Research Skills	85	6.41
Leadership Skills	65	4.90
Strategic ICT Skills	64	4.83
Ability to apply expert thinking	58	4.37
Innovative/Creative Skills	57	4.30
Problem Solving Skills	46	3.47
Teaching Skills	26	1.96
Total	1326	100.0

*Multiple Responses

3.3.3 Usefulness of Course Curriculum for Work

The relevance of curriculum to industry demands is crucial, with universities needing to establish partnerships for practical experiences and update facilities to reflect workplace environments (Rianto et al., 2022). A survey of library science graduates revealed high relevance of computer applications, cataloging, and internships to work competencies, emphasizing the need for practical components in courses (Muliyadi, 2022). Another study in the Philippines found that graduates' educational skills were highly matched with industry demands, suggesting curriculum responsiveness to employment needs (Toquero and Ulanday, 2021).

With regards to the usefulness of the courses in their professional work that the respondents have taken in college, the general education courses, core/major courses, elective courses, undergraduate thesis, and on the job training are examined in Table 11. The general education course includes languages (English and Filipino), humanities, mathematics, economics and etc. Major/core courses includes theory and methodology while elective courses includes various subfields in sociology such as family, environment, industrial sociology, sociology of education, population, disaster, gender, urban sociology and etc. The undergraduate thesis is a required course which is a venue for research collaboration between students and faculty.

The table below show that the 66.01% alumni respondents rated as Very Useful the general education basic courses in their professional work. There were 33.33% who indicated Usefulness of their undergraduate basic courses in their profession. Only one graduate said that it is not useful.

The core/major courses are subjects that students specialize in. By completing a major course, the student demonstrates sustained and high-level work in one subject. The core/major courses provides the student with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or behaviors needed to fulfill their college goals and objectives. A specific number of core/major courses are required by CHED to graduate from a degree program.

The alumni respondents answered that their core/major courses was Very Useful in their professional work comprising 63.39%. On the other hand, 34.64% said that it is Useful while 1.96% or 3 alumni respondents said that it was not useful in their work.

Elective courses are part of a required graduation plan, but they allow students more flexibility in how they fulfill those requirements. Students can use electives to enhance college or career possibilities or to learn new skills. Among the respondents, 47.72% said that the electives they have taken during college was Very Useful. There is a very small percentage of difference with the respondents who said that the electives were Useful in their work. A few or 5.22% finds their elective courses not useful.

An undergraduate thesis requires students to work on an original research topic with the guidance of a faculty adviser. Research collaboration is developed between the faculty adviser and the thesis students. Students are also given the opportunity to present their papers in national and international conferences and publish their papers. As indicated in the table below, 47.72% of the respondents see that the thesis is Very Useful in their profession. Almost a similar number or 41.17% said that their undergraduate thesis is Useful. On the other hand, 11.11% or 17 respondents indicated that research is not useful in their current profession.

Table 11. Summary of usefulness of course curriculum for work

Aspect	Very Useful		Useful		Not Useful	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
General Education/ Basic Courses	101	66.01	51	33.33	1	0.65
Core Courses/Major Courses	97	63.39	53	34.64	3	1.96
Elective Courses	73	47.72	72	47.05	8	5.22
Undergraduate Thesis	73	47.72	63	41.17	17	11.11
	344		239		29	

3.3.4 Perceived Strength of the BA Sociology Program

Four areas are considered with regards to the perceived strength of the BA Sociology program which is shown in Table 12. With a scale from 1-5 with

1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest score, the respondents were asked to rate the strength of the faculty, curriculum, facilities and library.

Table 12. Perceived strength of the program

Area	Mean rating	Remarks
Faculty	4.65	Very High
Curriculum	4.59	Very High
Facilities	4.25	Very High
Library	4.20	Very High
Grand Mean	4.42	Very High

In general, the grand mean for the perceived strength of the BA Sociology program is 4.42 which is very high. As shown in the table above, all of the four areas are rated very high by the respondents. Specifically, the faculty force of the department is rated with 4.65 which is the highest rating among the four areas. The curriculum is also rated with a mean rating of 4.59. It has to be emphasized that the Sociology Department is a Center of Development in Sociology (COD) and a delivering institution of CHED-HEI scholarship grants. The facilities and library were also rated as very high with mean ratings of 4.25 and 4.20, respectively.

Similar tracer studies reveal that state universities were deemed successful with faculty rated as proficient. Criminology programs received positive feedback, with alumni playing a major role in promoting opportunities (Springael-Esplana, 2023). In accountancy education, the curriculum and administrative support were rated highly, with instruction and support strongly linked to better licensure exam results (Ballado-Tan, 2015). A study on BSBA graduates found high employability (91%) and praised the program's content, though it highlighted a lack of practical applications, suggesting more real-world exposure (Orejana and Resurreccion, 2010).

3.3.5 Perceived Competitiveness of Sociology Graduates in the Job Market

The respondents were asked regarding their perception of the competitiveness of BA Sociology graduates in the job market as reflected in Table 13. In looking at graduate competitiveness, a study from the University of North Carolina says that the expansion of higher education has made earning a bachelor's degree seem less exceptional to employers (ASA 2018). The increase in the college graduation has saturated the job market and a bachelor's degree is now becoming the minimum qualification needed to apply for a job (Albina et al. 2020; Aranega 2014). Due to this, sociology graduates also face challenges in the job market. For instance, female sociology graduates in Italy experience underemployment and lower salaries despite better academic performance (Decataldo et al., 2019). In Spain, employability in sociology is characterized by diverse career paths, with instrumental and personal skills becoming increasingly relevant (Amorós and Yáñez, 2016).

In this study, 42.48% of respondents view BA Sociology graduates as very competitive in the job market, reflecting a strong confidence in their skills and readiness. Close behind, 39.21% believe these graduates are moderately

competitive, indicating a positive perception of their employability. Additionally, 18.95% of respondents consider themselves competitive, while a small number—just four individuals—feel they lack competitiveness in the job market. This aligns with the belief among sociology students that their degree imparts valuable insights into societal dynamics and attitudes, equipping them with essential skills for navigating the labor market effectively (Spahi?, 2023; Sándor, 2020).

Table 13. Perceived competitiveness of BA Sociology graduates

Competitiveness of Sociology Graduates in the Job Market	Frequency	Percentage
Very competitive	65	42.48
Moderately competitive	60	39.21
Competitive	29	18.95
Not competitive	4	2.61
Total	153	100.0

In the input-output model, the curriculum is the input and the process are the teaching and learning strategies (Martin, 2014). As viewed by the graduates, the curriculum was one of the strengths of the program. The curriculum is considered relevant and competitive. Moreover, the faculty are strategic in facilitating learning in order to obtain the knowledge and competencies useful for their future employment.

With regards to the output in terms of the knowledge, competencies and skills acquired by the graduates and whether these are useful in their hunt for a job, work ethic is important. In addition, teamwork, verbal skills, and interpersonal skills are also considered as very useful in getting a job.

4.0 Implication for Curriculum Enhancement

Alumni provided several recommendations to enhance the BA Sociology program, focusing on faculty, curriculum, facilities, and management as shown in Table 14.

Curriculum: Many alumni (43.88%) suggested incorporating on-the-job training (OJT), which was already added in the 2018 revised curriculum. Those who suggested this were respondents who graduated before 2018. Additionally, 18.37% recommended more immersion and co-curricular activities like field studies to give students practical insights. A few (3.06%) asked for more seminars, training, and elective courses, including education courses to improve employability. Enhancing verbal and written communication skills and integrating innovative and ICT skills were also suggested. Alumni advocated for continuing online/flexible learning post-pandemic and better marketing of the program.

Facilities and Resources: Suggestions included improving the library (10.20%), expanding the computer lab, and ensuring access to resources during

online learning. There was also a call for better classroom facilities and support for technology and infrastructure.

Faculty: Recommendations included improving faculty-student relationships, hiring more qualified faculty to reduce overload, and enhancing teaching strategies.

Management: Alumni proposed improving the enrollment and class management system, creating more student leadership opportunities, and fostering greater inter-departmental collaboration.

Overall, 35.94% of respondents were satisfied with the program, praising its organization and productivity.

Table 14. Recommendations to improve the program

Recommendations to improve the BA Sociology Program	Frequency	Percentage
Curriculum-related:		
Inclusion of OJT/Internship	43	43.88
More immersion and other co-curricular activities (field study, field work)	18	18.37
More seminars/trainings/conference	3	3.06
More elective courses (Rural and Urban Strategic Planning and Development, Sociology of Food, teaching courses)	3	3.06
Improve the courses/subjects offered (more verbal and writing courses)	2	2.04
Develop adaptability and innovative skills	1	1.02
Continue online classes post-COVID-19	1	1.02
Marketing to promote BA Sociology program	1	1.02
International student exchange	1	1.02
More ICT strategic skills	1	1.02
Facilities and Resources		
Better facilities and library reference materials especially for research	10	10.20
Bigger computer laboratory with better functioning computers	3	3.06
Consideration of student's access to resources due to COVID-19 and online learning	2	2.04
Develop research products to support resilient operation of facilities and system	1	1.02
More classrooms and improve classroom facilities	1	1.02

Faculty-related:		
Improve faculty-student relationship	2	2.04
Hire more qualified faculty	1	1.02
Improve teaching strategies	1	1.02
Other recommendations		
Improve enrolment process and class management	1	1.02
Create more opportunities for student leadership development	1	1.02
Increase collaboration and connection across departments	1	1.02
Total	98	100.0

4.1 Whether respondents are taking further studies

Many students pursue graduate studies for the love of learning and discovery as reflected in Table 15. Some students pursue graduate studies because their chosen profession requires a graduate degree while others are looking to change career paths or better position themselves for advancement opportunities. Among the respondents, 33.98% are taking further studies after graduating from the BA Sociology program.

Research also indicates that professionals often return to graduate school to shift into academia, change their specialty, or further their career (Peters and Daly, 2012). Key considerations in choosing a graduate program include available funding, career growth potential, personal development, and program flexibility. For doctoral students, the chance to engage in research is especially crucial (Shellhouse et al., 2020). Previous work experience in a field can also influence the decision to pursue graduate studies in that area (Ho et al., 2018).

Table 15. If respondents are taking further studies

Taking further Studies after Completing Baccalaureate Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	52	33.98
No	101	66.01
Total	153	100.0

For the 66.01% who did not pursue graduate education, Table 16 shows the reasons they cited which includes the result of their previous academic performance (35.26%) which they think would not fit in graduate education. This finding contrasts with Csheh-Papp et al. (2023), who found that individual performance during undergraduate studies does not affect students' decisions to either continue their education or enter the workforce after graduation.

Other respondents said that their current employment does not allow for time for further education (33.98%), and lack of funding or financial constraints (27.45%). Some of the respondents said that they did not enroll in graduate studies because they are pregnant, unsure about taking further studies and are planning to migrate to another country.

Table 16. Reasons for not taking further studies

Constraints on taking higher studies	Frequency	Percentage
Previous academic performance	54	35.29
Current Job	52	33.98
Funding/financial constraints	42	27.45
Other reasons (Pregnancy, unsure about further studies, planning to migrate)	5	3.26
Total	153	100.0

The alumni feedback pointed out areas that need improvement such as in the curriculum, human and infrastructure areas which are viewed as important input to advance the congruence between the curricular content, teaching and learning, and the employment transition and work of the graduates. These recommendations are valuable in the enhancement of the curricular design and the outcomes after graduation.

5.0 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

To determine the employment characteristics and job experiences of the BA Sociology graduates and their feedback on their educational experiences in the university to improve the delivery of the degree program is the main objective of the study.

There were 153 BA Sociology graduates who were included in the survey. The study used volunteer sampling for those who answered the Google survey form forwarded to the alumni through their personal Facebook messenger or through the official Facebook page of the Department. The participation rate of the graduates showed that there is a 55.43% participation from all graduates from 2016-2021. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data. The input-process-output (IPO) model was used to analyze the data.

In general, most of the respondents were represented by those who graduated in 2019. Majority is female. BA Sociology graduates have high

employability, with most securing their first job within one to three months of graduation. The most common initial positions are clerical support roles, freelance and online jobs, and professional roles. At the time of the interview, most respondents were employed. The main reasons for not being employed included ongoing job searches, pursuing further studies, and family-related reasons such as pregnancy.

Currently, respondents are primarily employed as professionals, clerical support workers, and technicians or associate professionals. Most hold regular or permanent positions in private companies, government agencies, or NGOs. Their job acquisition strategies include referrals from friends and family, online ads, and direct approaches to employers. Monthly household incomes for most respondents range from 10,000 to 14,999.

Most respondents have jobs related to their degree. The top five skills valued are work ethic, teamwork, verbal communication, interpersonal skills, and organizational abilities. These skills also contributed to their ability to secure employment within six months of graduation.

Most alumni found the general education courses, core/major courses, electives, and thesis highly useful in their professional work. Overall, the BA Sociology program is rated very highly across all areas-faculty, curriculum, facilities, and library. Respondents believe that BA Sociology graduates are very competitive in the job market.

Conclusively, the respondents are generally satisfied with the delivery of the programs but they give a number of suggestions to further enhance the delivery of the said program of the Institute. The respondents identified curriculum-related recommendations that could enhance the employability of the graduates such as the inclusion of OJT/Practicum, more immersion and co-curricular activities, and more seminars/trainings. There are also faculty-related suggestions such as improving faculty-student relations and hiring more faculty. The respondents also suggested facilities and resources-related improvements.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The primary goal of academic institutions is to produce skilled and highly qualified graduates who are competitive both locally and globally. A graduate tracer study is a valuable tool for assessing graduates' job performance and career trajectories.

The study reveals that BA Sociology alumni from 2016-2021 exhibit very high employability rates in both their first and current positions. The data shows that many alumni have progressed from clerical roles to professional and even managerial positions within four years of graduation, indicating initial career success.

In the input-output model, the curriculum is deemed relevant and competitive, with the skills and knowledge acquired-such as work ethic, teamwork, verbal communication, and interpersonal skills-proving useful for job acquisition. The alignment between the skills gained and the jobs secured by the graduates highlights the program's effectiveness in enhancing employability and shortening job search duration.

However, there is a need for improved feedback mechanisms, including ongoing assessment and monitoring, to further refine the curriculum and processes. Additionally, many graduates plan to pursue further studies, which underscores the importance of continuing to adapt and enhance the program to support their academic and professional aspirations. As such, there is a need to adopt a systematic approach for ongoing assessment and improvement of education programs which may enhance the relevance of course content and ensure that the program adapts to both local and global changes.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. Institutionalize Tracer Studies: Conduct tracer studies every 3-5 years. Ensure that these studies include both alumni and their employers. Develop a timeline for the studies and establish a protocol for data collection. Track the completion of these studies and analyze the inclusion of employer feedback to gauge effectiveness.
2. Revise the Curriculum: Update the curriculum to align with current job market skills. Form a curriculum review committee to evaluate industry trends and skills in demand. Implement changes based on the committee's recommendations and monitor the adoption of these updates in the academic schedule. Additionally, implement a structured process for continuous evaluation and enhancement of educational programs. This involves improving feedback systems, updating course content to maintain its relevance, and ensuring the program evolves in response to both local and global developments.
3. Enhance the Alumni Network: Improve the alumni network to regularly update information on graduates. Develop a user-friendly alumni database with periodic updates and communication channels. Track the frequency of updates and the accuracy of the information collected, aiming for a 90% update rate annually.
4. Develop Innovative Curricular Programs: Create programs that address contemporary societal and global issues. Design new courses or modules focused on current issues such as climate change, digital transformation, and global health. Monitor the enrollment and feedback in these new courses.
5. Improve the Tracer Study Questionnaire: Refine the graduate tracer study questionnaire by conducting a reliability index. Collaborate with experts to review and test the questionnaire for reliability and validity. Achieve a reliability score of at least 0.80 (Cronbach's alpha) and ensure the revised questionnaire is implemented in the next study cycle.

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