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TRACER STUDY OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS OF VISAYAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Tracer study is needed to understand how well a university has performed in terms of developing the competencies of its students and in preparing them for the world of work. This study was conducted to determine the employment characteristics and job experiences of the graduates of VSU's graduate degree programs, and their feedback on their educational experiences in the university. Data were gathered by sending online questionnaires to graduates with active email accounts, handing in questionnaires to alumni working in VSU and nearby agencies and institutions, and conducting interviews and focus group discussions with graduates working in some institutions in Bohol. Of the 73 respondents, 78% finished master's degree only at ViSCA/LSU/VSU, while 16% finished both master's and doctorate degrees from the university. Almost all (99%) are employed, 84% have regular or permanent positions, 78% are working in academic institutions/state universities and colleges either as faculty members, researchers, extension workers or administrative staff, 27% occupy supervisory positions, and 64% got promoted after earning their graduate degrees in VSU. A great majority of the respondents (92%) considered the graduate degrees they earned as highly relevant to their current jobs. The top five skills they learned in VSU which they found useful included teaching (78%), communication (69%), critical thinking (63%), problem-solving (55%), and human relation skills (52%). The graduate programs were

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rated high by the respondents in terms of seven criteria, including relevance of the program to professional requirements (4.65), teaching/learning environment (4.33), teacher-student relationship (4.31), quality of program delivery (4.29), range of courses offered (4.20), library, laboratory and other facilities (4.10), and work placement (4.07). This suggests that the respondents were generally satisfied with the university's graduate curricular offerings. However, they gave some suggestions to further improve the delivery of graduate degree programs by VSU.

Key words: employment characteristics, job experiences, graduates' feedback

INTRODUCTION

Graduate education plays an important role in the development of manpower that can provide leadership to efforts geared towards national development. It molds the human resources needed to propel at least two important driving forces of development – education and research.

According to the graduate school dean of the Pennsylvania State University, "Graduate education is an investment in solutions for the future" (Zimmerman, 2015). The dean explained that graduate students support the research enterprise that contributes to the country's economic development, provide the future intellectual capital for research and development enterprises throughout the U.S. assuring that the country will remain competitive in innovation and discovery, and contribute a great deal to the instructional mission in undergraduate classrooms. In an article published in the University World News (Sharma, 2014), it was reported that Asian countries have experienced huge increases not only in undergraduate enrolment but also in postgraduate education and university-based research because of the governments' demand for highly qualified faculty to teach at the university level.

Many universities throughout the world have participated in the noble effort of developing human resources by offering both

undergraduate and graduate education. One of these universities is the Visayas State University (VSU) located in Baybay City, Leyte, Philippines. In 1979, it started to offer graduate degree programs.

To understand how well a university has performed in terms of developing the competencies of its students and to gather information about the employability and employment status of its graduates, as well as their feedback on the degree programs they took from the university, a number of researchers have conducted graduate tracer studies (Latif & Bahroom, 2010; Menez, 2014; Ramirez, Cruz & Alcantara, 2014; Aquino et al., 2015). In an article entitled *Related Literature about Tracer Study* (n.d.), tracer study is described as an "approach used in most organizations, especially educational institutions, to track and to keep record of their students once they have graduated from the institution." It is a powerful tool to document the employment characteristics, transition to employment, and the graduates' level of satisfaction of a university's services, learning environment, and facilities (Gines, 2014). It can also reveal graduates' dissatisfaction with the curricular offerings (Shongwe & Ocholla, 2011).

According to the Tertiary Education Commission (2009), graduate tracer studies are important for educational planners because these can provide valuable information that can be used to gauge "the results of the higher education and training institutions." This information, the commission explained, may be used to minimize"any possible deficits in a given educational program in terms of content, delivery and relevance and for further development of the institution in the context of quality assurance." Through graduate tracer studies, an educational institution will be able to "evaluate the quality of education given to their graduates by knowing the graduates' placements and positions in the society which later can used as a benchmark in producing more qualified and competitive graduates" (*Related literature about tracer study*, n.d.).

The Visayas State University has already gone a long way in terms of offering graduate degree programs. Thus, a graduate tracer study is needed to determine the employment status and/or job performance of its graduates. Results of the tracer study can be used to guide the university in improving the quality, delivery, and relevance of its degree programs and in formulating strategies to enhance the

employability and/or job performance of its graduates.

This study aimed to determine the employment characteristics and job experiences of the graduates of the Visayas State University's graduate degree programs and their feedback on the graduate curricular offerings of the university. Specifically, it aimed to: (1) describe the socio-demographic profile of the respondents; (2) determine the employment characteristics and job experiences of the graduates; and (3) find out the graduates' feedback on the curricular programs they took in the university and their suggestions to improve the delivery of the degree programs.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted from January to December 2016 following the one-shot survey research design. Respondents included those who finished master's and doctoral degrees from the Visayas State University during the period 1995 to 2016.

To gather data on the graduates' sociodemographic and employment characteristics, job experiences, and feedback on the curricular programs they took in the university, staff of the VSU Graduate School and the Online Programs Office (OPO) sent online questionnaires to the graduates with active email accounts. They also distributed printed copies of the questionnaires to alumni working in VSU and nearby agencies/institutions. Moreover, they visited schools and agencies in Bohol where many of the graduates of the VSU Graduate School work. They conducted individual interviews with alumni working in various agencies and institutions in Tagbilaran City and nearby municipalities.

To supplement the data gathered from the survey, focus group discussions (FGDs) with the VSU alumni working in the Bohol Island State University (BISU) in Bilar, Bohol and in the Municipal Agriculture Office of Pilar, Bohol were conducted. These places were chosen as the FGD sites because many students who finished graduate education in VSU worked here. The questions asked during the FGDs included: (1) respondents' reasons for pursuing graduate education in the university,

(2) scholarships enjoyed while pursuing graduate degrees and their perceptions on how the scholarships helped them in their pursuit of graduate degrees, (3) mode of graduate program delivery that they took, (4) their perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of the university's graduate degree programs, and (5) their suggestions to improve the graduate degree offerings of the university.

Data gathered through the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency counts, percentages, totals and means. These are presented using tables and charts. On the other hand, data from the FGDs were analyzed using thematic analysis and are presented using narrative descriptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' profile

This section describes the respondents in terms of their country and region of origin, current address, age, sex, civil status, graduate degree programs completed in VSU, mode of graduate delivery program chosen, perceived advantages of taking courses on-campus, perceived advantages of distance education, scholarships enjoyed while pursuing graduate education in VSU, and perceived effects of scholarship on academic performance.

Country and region of origin. More than half of the respondents (56.2%) were from the Eastern Visayas region (Region 8) of the Philippines (Table 1). Nearly one-third (30%) came from Central Visayas (Region 7), while the others came from Regions 5, 6, 10 and 11. There was one respondent who came from New Zealand.

Current address. A large proportion of the respondents are currently living in Eastern Visayas (53%) and in Central Visayas (29%). The others are currently living in Regions 3, 4A, 5, 6, 10 and 11. One is currently living in New Zealand, while the other one lives in Germany (Table 2).

Table 1. Respondents' country and region of origin

COUNTRY/PROVINCE	FREQUENCY		PERCENT	
Philippines (72)				
Region 5 (Bicol Region)		2		2.8
Masbate	1		1.4	
Sorsogon	1		1.4	
Region 6 (Western Visayas)		4		5.4
Negros Occidental	2		2.7	
Capiz	2		2.7	
Region 7 (Central Visayas)		22		30.2
Bohol	18		24.7	
Cebu	3		4.1	
Negros Oriental	1		1.4	
Region 8 (Eastern Visayas)		41		56.2
Leyte	36		49.3	
Southern Leyte	4		5.5	
Eastern Samar	1		1.4	
Region 10 (Northen Mindanao)		2		2.8
Bukidnon	2		2.8	
Region 11 (Davao Region)		1		1.4
Davao	1		1.4	
New Zealand (1)		1		1.4
TOTAL		**73**		**100.0**

Table 2. Respondents' current address

COUNTRY/PROVINCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Philippines (71)		
Region 3 (Central Luzon)		
Tadac	1	1.4
Region 4A (CALABARZON)		
Laguna	3	4.1
Region 5 (Bicol Region)		
Capiz	2	2.7
Sorsogon	1	1.4
Region 6 (Western Visayas)		
Negros Occidental	1	1.4
Region 7 (Central Visayas)		
Bohol	17	23.3
Cebu	2	2.7
Negros Oriental	2	2.7
Sub total	21	28.7
Region 8 (Eastern Visayas)		
Leyte	35	47.9
Southern Leyte	1	1.4
Western Samar	2	2.7
Eastern Samar	1	1.4
Sub total	39	53.4
Region 10 (Northern Mindanao)		
Bukidnon	2	2.8
Region 11 (Davao Region)		
Davao	1	1.4
New Zealand	1	1.4
Germany	1	1.4
TOTAL	**73**	**100.0**

Sex, age, and civil status. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (73%) were female, more than half (53%) were middle-aged (22 to 25 years old), and nearly two-thirds (63%) were married (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency and percentage distribution of respondents according to sex, age, and civil status

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Sex			
Female		53	72.6
Male		20	27.4
	TOTAL	73	100.0
Age			
Middle Age (22 – 45 years old)		39	53.4
Old (45 – 59 years old)		31	42.5
Senior Citizen (60 years old and above)		3	4.1
	TOTAL	73	100.0
Civil Status			
Single		20	27.4
Married		46	63.0
Widow or Widower		7	9.6
	TOTAL	73	100.0

Graduate degree programs completed in VSU. Of the 73 respondents, 57 (78%) finished master's degrees only in VSU. Twelve (16%) finished both master's and PhD degrees from the university, while the remaining four (6%) took only their PhD degree from the university (Fig. 1).

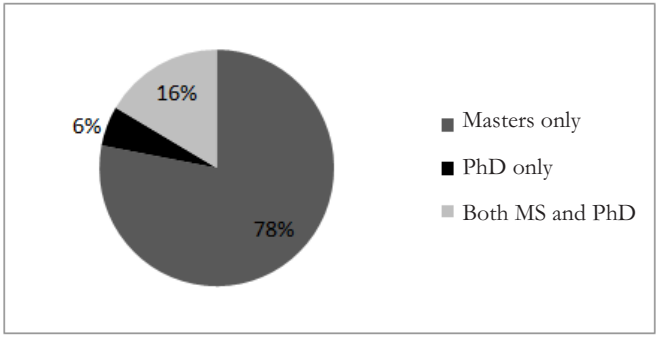

Figure 1. Degree programs completed by the respondents in VSU

Of the 16 students who finished PhD in VSU, 11 (69%) took up Agricultural Education as the major field, three (19%) completed Animal Science, and the remaining two (12%) finished Horticulture (Fig. 2). The highest percentage of them (44%) completed their PhDs from 2011 to 2016 (Fig. 3).

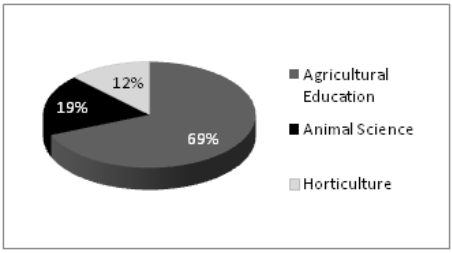

Figure 2. Fields of specialization of the respondents who finished PhD in VSU

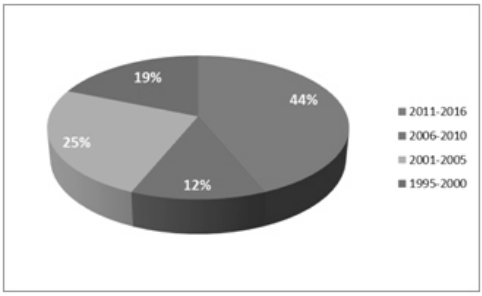

Figure 3. Year when the respondents finished their PhD degrees in VSU

On the other hand, of the 69 respondents who finished their master's degree in the university, 47 (78%) completed Master of Science with various major fields of specialization; 16 (23%) finished Master in Agricultural Development (MAgDev) with majors in Agricultural Extension, Agricultural Education and Animal Production and 6 (9%) took up Master in Education (MEd) with majors in Biology and English (Table 4). Nearly half of them (49%) finished their degrees in the last 6 years (2011 to 2016) (Table 5).

Table 4. Degree and field of specialization of the respondents who finished master's degree in VSU

DEGREE AND FIELD OF SPECIALIZATION		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
MAgDev			
Agricultural Education		5	7.2
Agricultural Extension		7	10.1
Animal Production		4	5.8
	Sub-total	***16***	***23.2***
Master of Science			
Horticulture		8	11.6
Agronomy		7	10.1
Animal Science		7	10.1
Soil Science		2	2.9
Agricultural Economics		4	5.8
Plant Pathology		1	1.4
Agricultural Education		7	10.1
Agricultural Extension		4	5.8
Development Communication		2	2.9
Food Science and Technology		3	4.3
Agricultural Engineering		1	1.4
Tropical Ecology		1	1.4
	Sub-total	***47***	***68.1***
Master in Education (MEd) (n = 6)			
Biology		4	5.8
English		2	2.9
	Sub-total	***6***	***8.7***
	TOTAL	**69**	**100**

Table 5. Year when the respondents completed their master's degrees in VSU

YEAR GRADUATED	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
2011-2016	33	47.8
2006-2010	5	7.2
2001-2005	10	14.5
1996-2000	5	7.2
1991-1995	13	18.8
1986-1990	3	4.3
TOTAL	**69**	**100**

Mode of graduate program delivery chosen. More than three-fourths of the respondents (78%) pursued their graduate education through the on-campus mode. This implies that more graduate students of VSU still prefer the traditional mode of learning through on-campus instruction. However, results of this study also show that some students of the university are already beginning to see the potential of distance education. Nearly one-fifth (19%) of the respondents revealed that they were able to finish their degree through a combination of on-

campus instruction and distance learning, while a few (3%) finished their degree via the distance education mode (Fig. 4).

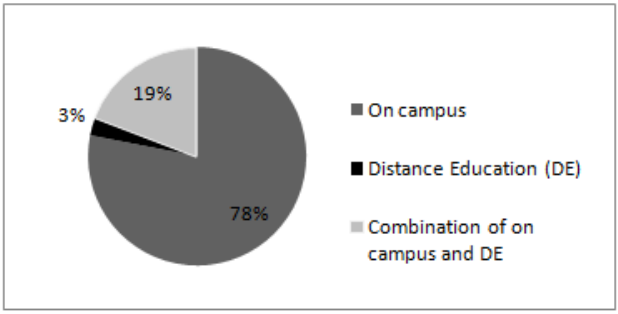

Figure 4. Mode of graduate delivery program pursued by the respondents

Perceived advantages of taking courses on-campus. When asked about their perceived advantages of pursuing graduate education through the on-campus mode, the respondents gave a number of responses (Table 6). The highest percentage of them (83%) said on-campus education allowed them to interact closely with their professors. More than two-thirds said it allowed them to focus on their studies (70%), interact with their classmates (66%), and have better access to laboratory facilities (66%). More than half (59%) said it allowed them to have better access to reference materials and nearly one-half (49%) said it forced them to finish their degree on time. These findings are similar to that of the study of Jefferson and Arnold (2009) which revealed that students perceive a number of advantages of face-to-face or on-campus learning environment, including access to support from professors and other students/classmates, immediate response to questions, and the allocation of specific time for learning, among others.

Perceived advantages of distance education. On the other hand, the 16 respondents who were able to complete their graduate degrees through the distance education (DE) mode or through a combination of DE and on-campus instruction also cited advantages of the said program delivery modes. All of them said that DE allowed them

to pursue graduate education without necessarily leaving their workplace (Table 7). Half of them also said that DE allowed them to pursue graduate education without leaving their families. These findings are similar to the study of Hannay and Newvine (2006) which found that many students chose distance learning because "they had other commitments which limited their ability to take classes in the traditional format" (p.5). Results of this study are also similar to the findings of study of Jefferson and Arnold (2009) which showed that many students considered distance learning advantageous because of several reasons, which include flexibility as it allows them to work at their own pace and less travel as distance learning allows them to study without leaving their homes.

Table 6. Respondents' perceived advantages of taking the on-campus mode of program delivery

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES	FREQUENCY* (n=71)	PERCENT
It allowed me to interact closely with my professors.	59	83.1
It enabled me to focus on my studies.	50	70.4
It allowed me to interact with my classmates.	47	66.2
It allowed me to have better access to laboratory facilities.	47	66.2
It allowed me to have better access to references.	42	59.2
It forced me to finish my degree on time.	35	49.3
Others		
It enabled me to accomplish/submit requirements on time.	2	2.8
It gave me the chance to enrich my knowledge and skills in agricultural technology.	1	1.4
It enabled me to conduct actual research and gain more knowledge and skill in my field of specialization.	1	1.4

**Multiple response*

Table 7. Respondents' perceived advantages of the distance education (DE) or a combination of on-campus and DE mode of graduate program delivery

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES	FREQUENCY* (n = 16)	PERCENT
It allowed me to pursue graduate education without leaving my workplace.	16	100
It allowed me to pursue graduate education without leaving my family.	8	50
I can work on the guide questions at a proper time when I am ready to do it.	1	6.25
Less expense on the part of the student.	1	6.25
It gave me time to attend to personal projects and undertakings.	1	6.25

**Multiple response*

Scholarships enjoyed while pursuing graduate degrees in VSU. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of the 73 respondents had scholarships when they pursued their graduate degrees in VSU (Fig. 5). Their scholarships were provided by various agencies/organizations/programs (Table 8). The highest percentage of the respondents who had scholarships were DOST scholars (35%), followed by those who got fellowships and graduate teaching assistantships (GTA) from VSU (32%). The others were scholars of ATEP, CHED, DA-ATI, DA-BAR, COCOFED and EDPITAF.

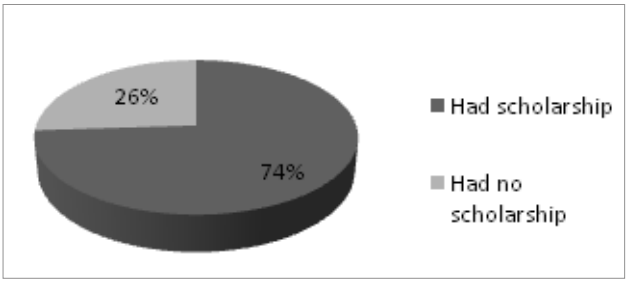

Figure 5. Percentage distribution of respondents according to scholarship enjoyed while pursuing graduate degree in VSU

Table 8. Agencies/programs providing scholarships to the respondents while pursuing graduate education in VSU

FUNDING AGENCY/PROGRAM	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Department of Science and Technology (DOST; under the ASTHRDP)	19	35.2
Visayas State University (Fellowship/Graduate Teaching Assistantship)	17	31.5
Agricultural Technical Education Program (ATEP) (DATE-MATE Program)	6	11.1
Commission on Higher Education (CHED)	4	7.4
Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI)	3	5.6
Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR)	2	3.7
Philippine Coconut Producers Federation Inc. (COCOFED)	2	3.7
Educational Development Projects Implementing Task Force (EDPITAF)	1	1.9
TOTAL	**54**	**100**

Perceived effects of scholarship on academic performance. When asked how their scholarships affected their academic performance, many of the respondents gave multiple responses (Table 9). The highest percentage of them (87%) said that their scholarship encouraged them to get good grades. Nearly two-thirds (65%) said their scholarships helped them provide for their personal and educational needs and more than half said their scholarships helped them finish their degrees on time (59%) and accomplish their requirements on time (56%). These results support the findings of Zacharias, Cherednichenko, Ryan, George and Gasparini's (2016) study which showed that students with scholarships had higher retention and success rates than those without scholarships. Specifically, Zacharias et al. (2016) found that of the respondents who said that their scholarship helped them stay in the university, 46% said it helped them academically by allowing them more time and attention to study since it reduced stress and worry and it helped with their educational and living expenses.

Table 9. Effects of scholarship on the respondents' academic performance

EFFECTS	FREQUENCY* (n=54)	PERCENT
It encouraged me to get good grades.	47	87.0
It helped me provide for my personal and educational needs.	35	64.8
It helped me finish my degree on time.	32	59.3
It helped me accomplish my requirements on time.	30	55.6
It was instrumental for my promotion.	1	1.9
It brought me to many other places and educational institutions.	1	1.9
It helped me finish my degree and accomplish my requirements though not on time.	1	1.9
It helped me develop self-confidence.	1	1.9

**Multiple response*

Employment characteristics

Employment status. As shown in Figure 6, almost all (99%) of the 73 respondents were employed at the time of this study. The lone respondent who reported to be unemployed was actually pursuing a doctoral degree in VSU through the DOST scholarship program.

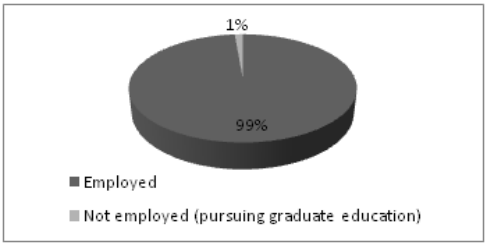

Figure 6. Respondents' employment status

Status of appointment. More than four-fifths of the respondents (84%) reported to have regular or permanent status of appointment in their current jobs. The remaining few either had contractual, temporary or casual appointments (Table 10). One respondent reported to be self-employed. She said that among the skills she learned from her graduate education in VSU, the ones that she was able to apply in her business are interpersonal skills, adaptability, critical thinking skills, and technical skills.

Table 10. Respondents' status of appointment

STATUS OF APPOINTMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Regular/Permanent	61	83.6
Contractual	5	6.8
Temporary	3	4.1
Casual	2	2.7
Self-Employed	1	1.4
Not employed/ pursuing graduate studies	1	1.4
TOTAL	**73**	**100**

Organizations where respondents are working. The respondents who are currently employed are connected with various organizations. More than three-fourths of them (78%) are working in academic institutions, specifically colleges or universities. This suggests that the university was able to help in satisfying the demand for highly qualified faculty to teach at the university level (Sharma, 2014). The rest are working in government agencies, local government units (LGUs), the Department of Education (DepEd), non-government organization (NGO) and the private sector (Table 11).

Table 11. Institutions/organizations where the respondents are working

AGENCY/INSTITUTION/ORGANIZATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Academe/Universities and Colleges	57	78.1
Government Agencies	6	8.2
Local Government Unit (LGU)	3	4.1
Department of Education (DepEd)	2	2.7
Non-government Organization (NGO)	1	1.4
Private Sector	1	1.4
Not Indicated	3	4.1
TOTAL	**73**	**100**

Job positions/rank. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (74%) were holding academic positions. The highest number of them (33%) worked as college instructors, followed by those who were holding the rank of associate professor. There were only five respondents (7%) who indicated that they are holding administrative positions, although in the follow up question, it turned out that there were more than five since some of those holding academic positions were also designated to head some offices. The other respondents were holding research or extension-related positions (Table 12).

Table 12. Respondents' position/rank

JOB POSITION/RANK	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Academic positions		
Professor	3	4.1
Associate Professor	19	26.0
Assistant Professor	7	9.6
Instructor	24	32.9
Master Teacher	1	1.4
Sub-total	**54**	**74.0**
Administrative positions		
SUC Vice President	1	1.4
Department Head	1	1.4
Training Center Superintendent	2	2.7
Project Coordinator	1	1.4
Sub-total	**5**	**6.8**
Research/extension positions		
Agriculturist/Agricultural Technologist	3	4.1
Regional Technical Staff	1	1.4
Media Production Specialist II	1	1.4
Senior Science Research Specialist	1	1.4
Science Research Specialist	1	1.4
SST II	1	1.4
Laboratory Aide II	1	1.4
Checkout Operator	1	1.4
Job Order	1	1.4
Sub-total	**11**	**15.1**
Not Indicated	3	4.1
TOTAL	73	100.0

Administrative positions held by respondents. A total of 20 respondents are occupying administrative positions (Table 13). Nearly one-third of them (30%) are serving as Department Heads, 3 (15%) are College Deans, another three (15%) are heads of their college's Research, Development and Extension Office, while the others are serving as School Administrator, Principal, College Secretary, Training Center Director, Program/Project Managers, and Quality Assurance Officer. At the time of the study, one respondent was even serving as SUC Vice President.

Table 13. Administrative positions currently held by the respondents

ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Department Head	6	30
College Dean/Dean of Graduate School	3	15
College RDE Coordinator/RDE Office Head	3	15
Program/Project manager	2	10
SUC Vice President	1	5
School Administrator	1	5
School Principal	1	5
College Secretary	1	5
Research/Training Center Director	1	5
University Quality Assurance Officer	1	5
TOTAL	**20**	**100**

Job experiences

Monthly salaries. Almost half of the respondents had a monthly salary ranging from ₱21,000.00 to ₱30,000.00 (26%) and from ₱11,000.00 to ₱20,000.00 (21.9%). Only one had an income below ten thousand pesos; the others had incomes ranging from ₱31,000.00 to ₱90,000.00 (Table 14).

Table 14. Respondents' current monthly salaries

INCOME RANGE (in pesos)	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
10,000.00 and below	1	1.4
11,000.00 - 20,00.00	16	21.9
21,000.00 - 30,00.00	19	26.0
31,000.00 - 40,00.00	13	17.8
41,000.00 - 50,00.00	8	11.0
51,000.00 - 60,00.00	8	11.0
61,000.00 -70,00.00	3	4.1
71,000.00 - 80,00.00	2	2.7
81,000.00 - 90,00.00	1	1.4
No Answer	2	2.7
TOTAL	73	100

Promotion due to graduate degree obtained. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents (64%) reported that they were promoted as a result of their completion of a graduate degree in VSU (Table 15). Of the 47 respondents who said they were promoted, more than one-fourth (28%) were promoted from Instructor to Assistant Professor. A little over one-tenth (11%) were promoted from being science research assistants to instructors. Other information about the respondents' promotion are presented in Table 16.

Table 15. Respondents' experience of being promoted after completing graduate degree in VSU

BEING PROMOTED	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Yes	47	64.4
No	21	28.8
No Answer	5	6.8
TOTAL	**73**	**100**

Table 16. Positions to which the respondents were promoted

FROM	TO	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Instructor	Assistant Professor	13	27.7
Science Research Assistant	Instructor	5	10.6
Instructor I	Instructor III	4	8.5
Teacher I	College Instructors, Teacher 3, Master Teacher 2	4	8.5
Teacher III	Assistant Prof II	3	6.4
Teacher II	Instructor II	2	4.3
Instructor	Associate Professor	2	4.3
Assistant Prof I	Assistant Prof III	2	4.3
Assistant Prof.	Associate Prof	2	4.3
Part time instructor	Instructor 1	1	2.1
Professor III	Professor V	1	2.1
Agricultural Technologist	Senior Science Research Specialist	1	2.1
Coconut Development Officer	Regional Technical Staff	1	2.1
Program Coordinator	Deputy Program Manager	1	2.1
Municipal Agricultural Officer	Municipal Agriculturist	1	2.1
Sales Manager	Area Manager	1	2.1
Senior Agriculturist	Training Center Superintendent	1	2.1
Senior Agriculturist	Municipal Agriculturist	1	2.1
TOTAL		**47**	**100**

Awards received. A number of respondents revealed that they received awards in relation to their job performance. These awards include Best Research Paper during local and international research

symposia (25%), Best Poster (10%), Best Teacher Award (10%), Agri-Pinoy Achiever Award (10%) and others. The other awards received by the respondents are shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Awards received by the respondents

AWARDS RECEIVED	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Best Research Paper		
• Local	3	15
• International	2	10
Best Poster	2	10
Best Teacher Award/Outstanding Faculty Award	2	10
Agri-pinoy Rice Achiever Awardee	2	10
Best Faculty Researcher	1	5
Best Research Presenter	1	5
Outstanding Extensionist Award	1	5
Exemplary Unit Head (supervisory level award) 2015	1	5
Outstanding Hybrid Technician	1	5
Outstanding Rice Technician	1	5
Civil Service Commission "Pag-asa Award 2016" (Group Category)	1	5
Gawad Linut-Oranim Award (young professional)	1	5
Loyalty Award	1	5
TOTAL	**20**	**100**

In general, the findings of this study showed that the respondents' employment status and job performance were improved after they finished graduate studies from the university. This supports the findings of Menez (2014) that finishing graduate studies "contributed to the graduate's professional advancement". Specifically, she found that almost all her respondents who finished Masters in Business Administration are gainfully employed locally with regular status and are holding professional and managerial positions.

Respondents' feedback

Perceived relatedness and relevance of the respondents' graduate degrees to their jobs. More than three-fourths of the respondents (78%) revealed that their first job was related to the graduate degree program that they completed in VSU (Table 18). Also, a great majority of the respondents (92%) perceived that the graduate degree program they were able to complete in VSU is highly related and relevant to their current job.

Table 18. Respondents' perceptions on the relatedness of their first job with the graduate degree program they completed in VSU and the relevance of their graduate degree program with their current job

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Is first job related to graduate degree program?		
Yes	57	78.1
No	12	16.4
No answer	4	5.5
TOTAL	73	100
Relevance of graduate degree program to current job		
Relevant	67	91.8
Not relevant	3	4.1
No answer	3	4.1
TOTAL	73	100

Competencies found useful to current job. As shown in Table 19, the respondents considered a number of competencies learned from their graduate studies in VSU as useful to their current jobs. The top five skills found by the respondents as useful and relevant to their jobs include teaching skills (78%), communication skills (69%), critical thinking skills (63%), problem-solving skills (55%), and human relation skills (52%). This result is similar to the findings of Menez (2014) and Aquino et al. (2015) that among the skills learned from school that are considered by graduates as useful and relevant to their jobs include communication skills, human relation skills, technical skills, and the values of love of God, honesty, love for truth and perseverance and hard work.

Table 19. Competencies/skills learned by respondents from their graduate education in VSU that they consider as very useful in their current job

COMPETENCIES	FREQUENCY* (n=73)	PERCENT
Teaching skills	57	78.1
Communication skill	50	68.5
Critical Thinking skills	46	63.0
Problem-solving skills	40	54.8
Human Relations skills	38	52.1
Entrepreneurial/Managerial skills	25	34.2
Information Technology skills	20	27.4
Research skills	4	5.5
Technical skills	2	2.7
More skills related to Biological Sciences	1	1.4

**Multiple response*

Strengths of the graduate curricular programs. Respondents were also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the graduate curricular programs that they took in VSU considering some given criteria. As shown in Table 20, the graduate degree programs earned high average ratings (from 4.07 to 4.65) in terms of seven (7) criteria, including relevance of the program to professional requirements (4.65), teaching/learning environment (4.33), teacher-student relationship (4.31), quality of program delivery (4.29), range of courses offered (4.20), library, laboratory and other facilities (4.10), and work placement/attachment (4.07). This suggests that the graduate curricular programs offered by VSU are relatively strong in terms of the abovementioned features. On the other hand, the graduate programs earned relatively lower average ratings in terms of the number of optional subjects (3.87) and extracurricular activities (3.46). This means that a review in these areas may be needed to improve students' satisfaction of the graduate curricular offerings.

Table 20. Frequency distribution of respondents according to their ratings on the strengths or weaknesses of the graduate curricular programs they took in VSU

CRITERIA	AVE RATING*	QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTION
Relevance of the program to professional requirements	4.65	Very strong
Teaching/Learning environment	4.33	Strong
Teacher-Student Relationship	4.31	Strong
Quality of program delivery	4.29	Strong
Range of courses offered	4.20	Strong
Library, laboratory and other facilities	4.10	Strong
Work placement/attachment	4.07	Strong
Number of optional subjects	3.87	Strong
Extracurricular activities	3.46	Cannot decide

**Qualitative description of the ratings: 1=very weak, 2 = weak, 3 = cannot decide, 4 = strong, 5 = very strong*

Suggestions for improvement

Aside from the competencies learned from their graduate studies in the university, respondents were also asked about their suggestions to improve the delivery of the graduate degree programs in the university. The respondents' suggestions include the following: (1) strengthening

graduate students' capability to conduct research and write scientific articles for publication in refereed journals, (2) offering more doctoral programs on campus and more graduate degree programs through the distance education mode, (3) improving students' access to the internet, modern laboratory facilities, and learning resources including e-journals, (4) providing more housing facilities for students, and (5) including extramural students with high grades among the honor students recognized during the university's honors and awards convocation.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that VSU has successfully attained its goal of developing manpower which can provide leadership in addressing the development needs specifically of the Visayas region. This is manifested by the high percentage of graduates who are occupying academic (instruction and research) and supervisory positions in state colleges and universities, government agencies, and local government units in the Visayas and the neighboring regions.

The degree programs pursued by the graduate students in VSU were also able to help improve the skills of the students and the employment status of the graduates. These are manifested by the high percentage of respondents who reported that the degrees they earned in VSU were highly related and relevant to their current jobs, the high percentage of respondents who indicated a number of skills they learned in VSU and found useful in the performance of their jobs, the high number of respondents who are having regular and/or permanent items, and those who reported to have been promoted because of their completion of a graduate degree in VSU.

Results of this study further suggest that the respondents were generally satisfied with the delivery of the graduate degree programs of VSU. This is supported by the high average ratings given by the respondents on the university's curricular offerings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although results of the study suggested that the respondents were generally satisfied with the delivery of the graduate degree programs of VSU, still they gave a number of suggestions to further enhance the delivery of the graduate degree programs of the university. It is strongly recommended that the VSU Graduate School administrators and curriculum planners review these suggestions and use these as bases in formulating strategies that can make the graduate curricular offerings of the university more responsive to the needs of the students and the employers.

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