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A Tracer Study on the Employability Status of the University of the Immaculate Conception Accountancy Graduates: Implication of their Academic Training

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of the University of the Immaculate Conception is to produce competent graduates who can help transform the society. The competence of the UIC graduates could be manifested in their employability mainly on their field of expertise. Hence, this research was designed to gather information on the employability of the UIC's Accountancy graduates. The survey was conducted in a nationwide scope using the social media network like Facebook, personal distribution, and short messaging approaches. Results show that 75% of the respondents are Certified Public Accountants; 79% was employed with 26% landing on their first job in less than a month after submitting their application; and a majority (56%) is employed with the commerce and industry sector. The primary reason of changing job is for economic – better salary scale. On the other hand, the abilities identified by the respondents useful in their job include: the skills on entrepreneurial, human resource, communication, critical thinking, information technology and problem-solving.

KEYWORDS: Accountancy, tracer study, employability, descriptive survey, Davao City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The growth of a country will depend primarily on the quality of workers or human resources of the different sectors of the economy (de Ocampo and Banzuela, 2009). Apparently, according to Mc Dowell (2002) the issue of quality in any sector can be attributed to the quality of training, education and professional development.

According to UN statistics, there are over 1 billion young people in 2000, which accounts for 20% of the total world population. 85% are living in developing countries, of which 60% are located in Asia. 100 million of these youths are enrolled in university-level education. Despite the fact that young people appear to be receiving more and better education, youth unemployment has increased steadily since 1993 (ILO, 2006). Global youth unemployment rate has been sticky and remained at its crisis since 2009. By 2015, the total number of young Filipinos is expected to rise to 61 million; 28 million will be of working age, further boosting the supply of young people in the market (ILO, 2013).

The Philippines also faces the same problems of high unemployment and underemployment rates. The unemployment rate in the Philippines as of 2012 was 7% and 21% of these are college graduates (Bureau of Labor & Employment Statistics, Philippines, 2012). In a study done by De Ocampo (2009), it was found out that most young people prefer the security of tenure in a job through the employment route, at least shortly after graduation. Fresh college graduates today, who are seeking gainful employment to compete for jobs, are not growing at the same pace with the demand from the industry for their services. The Philippine education system produces more and more college graduates with various professional disciplines such as commerce, engineering, health, sciences and law yet jobs are not readily available for these graduates (Albert, 2014). According to Senior Research Fellow of NSCB Jose Albert “while it is easy to label these cases as job mismatch, but the reality may be far complex especially since there are now more and more jobs that actually accept graduates from all sorts of disciplines.”

Filipinos have a deep regard for education. Dolan (n.d.) had observed that Filipinos view education as a primary avenue for upward social and economic mobility and the major sources of knowledge are the schools. He further observed that the higher a person achieve on the formal educational ladder, the more he/she attains knowledge and expectedly acquires more employment opportunities. In addition, according to Work-search Information Network although education makes an individual become eligible to apply for a job one must exhibit a mix of

skills to be successful at the job. These employability skills are divided into three skill sets: basic academic skills, critical thinking skills and personal qualities.

Employers require prospective employees to be well rounded and with employability skills relevant to their businesses. Education has become a major criterion for employment eligibility. It is expected of every graduate of higher education to be equipped with all that is needed to be employed and ultimately attain the fulfillment of their dreams. Verona (2005) said that it is the task of the different colleges and universities to train the human resources of the country with appropriate and relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes in order for these people to become useful, productive and gainfully employed members of society. Verona further stressed that investments in education would be a waste if manpower resources do not match with the industry's needs and demands.

The University of the Immaculate Conception (UIC) (previously called the Immaculate Conception College) started offering a business course called Collegiate Secretarial Course in July of 1950. This became the Associate in Commercial Science, a two-year collegiate course, in June 11, 1956. Five years later, in June 1961, this was offered as a four-year course known as Bachelor of Science in Commerce (BSC) with majors in Accounting, Marketing and Management. BSC major in Accounting is a licensure course where a national board examination is administered by the Professional Regulation Commission. The graduate, after taking and passing the examination will earn the title Certified Public Accountant (CPA). The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), in its Memorandum Circular (CMO) 009 Series of 1991 dated June 20, 1991 has mandated that the Bachelor of Science in Commerce, major in Accounting be changed to Bachelor of Science in Accountancy (BSA) effective School Year (SY) 1991-1992. From SY 1994-1995 up to SY 2012-2013, UIC has already produced 634 graduates and two topnotchers. For the five year period covered in this study – SY 2008-2009 to SY 2012-2013 out of 75 accountancy graduates, 55 or 73.3% successfully passed the CPA Licensure Examination one of whom was a ninth placer.

For more than two decades of producing BSA graduates, no research was made to map out their employability. Thus, this study is conducted to track down the graduates of the university's BSA program and to determine which skills these graduates have learned in college that they find very useful in their workplace. Moreover, this endeavor is in response to the challenge of the Commission on Higher Education to document the professional endeavors of the graduates of any academic program.

This study will serve as a feedback mechanism for the university to come

up with a more productive, competitive and effective business program for the students. In addition, this study will be the university's response to the call of CHED for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to conduct tracer studies.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on two curriculum theories – Big Bulk Theory and Transformation Theory made popular by Doll in 1996 as cited by Melina (2001) in her study about the relevance and effectiveness of general education curriculum among Higher Education Institutions in Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon (CALABARZON) area. According to the Big Bulk Theory, one of the major purposes of a school is to hone the youth, especially the college students to be competent and productive. The curriculum therefore, of every academic institution must be geared towards the skill development of the students to prepare them to be competent workers in their respective field of expertise. The Transformation Theory which is also termed as Restructuring Theory focuses on the exposure of students to varied learning situations leading to authentic learning experiences. In this manner, graduates will be ready to combat challenges in life after college.

Objectives of the Study. This study aimed to gather information on the employability of the UIC's BSA graduates. Specifically, it intended to attain the following specific objectives: 1) to determine the profile – sex, civil status, residence and further studies of the respondents; 2) to present the respondents' CPA board examination data; 3) to document the respondents' employment data in line with employment rate, job information, waiting time prior to employment, means of finding their job, reasons of staying in their job, sectors of their employment, reasons of changing job and period of staying with the first job; 4) to identify the skills useful in the respondents' first job; and 5) to present the evaluation rating of the respondents on the ABA Program, Faculty, Facilities and Student Services.

METHOD

The study used the descriptive survey design as it described the employment-related information of the respondents. The survey was conducted in a nationwide scope using the social media network like Facebook. It also employed the personal distribution, telephone brigade and short messaging approaches in prospecting respondents. The data gathering was intensified through the assistance of enrolled undergraduate students who have relatives and friends who are BSA graduates of UIC.

The data gathering tool consists of questions for the employed, not employed and never employed and those who opted for self-employment. The tool is a six page questionnaire comprised of 36 mostly close-ended questions. The questionnaire was adopted from the CHED Tracer Questionnaire but was modified to fit with the respondents.

The official list of the graduates was taken from the records of the Dean of the Accountancy & Business Administration Program. A total enumeration of 75 graduates was targeted, however only 54 participated in the survey. The respondents included only those BSA graduates of UIC from March, 2009 to March, 2013.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Of the 54 graduates who have been traced, 98% (53) were single and 2% (1) was married, 39% (21) were males and 61% (33) were females. 83% or 45 came from the cities/provinces outside Davao City and only 17% from Davao City (Table 1).

It is notable that 17% (9) of the respondents have pursued Graduate studies (Figure 2). They have revealed the following reasons of pursuing graduate studies: for professional development, for better employment opportunities and for promotion. On the other hand, the primary reason why only 17% of the Accountancy graduates from 2009 to 2013 took up further studies is due to adjustment to their jobs since most of them were hired for professional, technical or supervisory positions right after they passed the board examination. Another reason is attributed to the job assignments outside the city, hence, the difficulty of commuting.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Social status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	53	98
Married	1	2
Sex		
Males	21	39
Females	33	61
Permanent Address		
Davao City	45	83
Outside Davao City	9	17

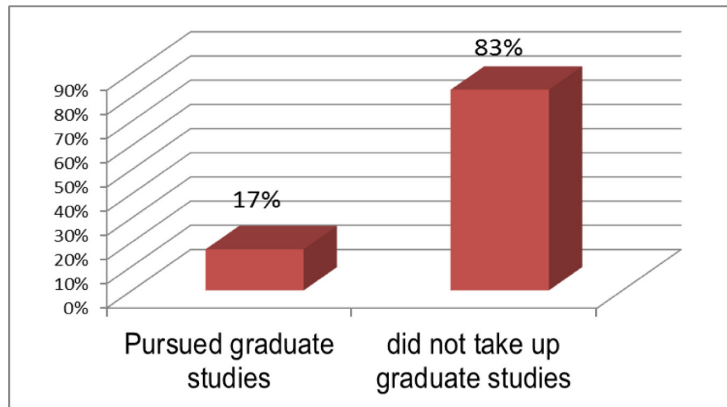


Figure 2. Data on further studies

CPA Board Examination Data

As to the CPA board examination data, as shown in Figure 3, 76% (41) of them had taken and passed the CPA Board Examination, 6% (3) took the examination but did not pass and 19% (10) had not taken the CPA Board. This result showed the very good performance of the BSA course of the university since out of 44 respondents who took the Board examination for the past five years, only three (3) did not pass. Moreover, most of the 10 respondents who had not taken the board examination were actually having their review classes for the CPA Board examination during the survey for this study.

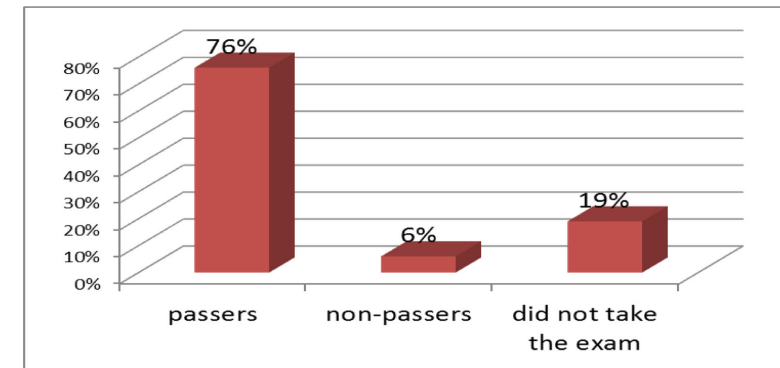


Figure 3. Board examination data

Reasons for Taking up Accountancy Course

The number one reason for choosing Accountancy was for better employment opportunities. Second, they were influenced by parents and relatives. Third reason was due to their good grades in high school. Fourth was their expectation of better compensation. Fifth was due to their good grades in the subject area. Sixth, they were influenced by their peers. The last was becoming a CPA as a childhood dream. The outcome of this question could be interpreted that the Accountancy graduates were looking forward as employees of the different industries with better opportunities and compensation as compared to graduates of other courses.

Employment Data

As shown in Figure 4, out of the 54 respondents, 79% (43) were employed, 13% (7) were not employed (undergoing CPA review classes when the survey was conducted). 6% (3) indicated they were never employed due to family concern, enrolled at Law school or due to health reasons and 2% (1) engaged in business. This finding could mean that there was really no employment problem on the university’s Accountancy graduates as most of them were immediately employed after passing the Board Exam, except those who were reviewing for the CPA Board Exam, those who took up Law, and with family problem. 82% (35) of these employed respondents were regular/permanent employees, 9% (4) on temporary

employment, 7% (3) on contractual and 2% (1) on casual employment. Lack of experience and relevant skills are the specific barriers to entry in the youth school-to-work transition (ILO, 2013). This barrier may not be necessarily true with regards to the UIC accountancy graduates covered by this tracer study.

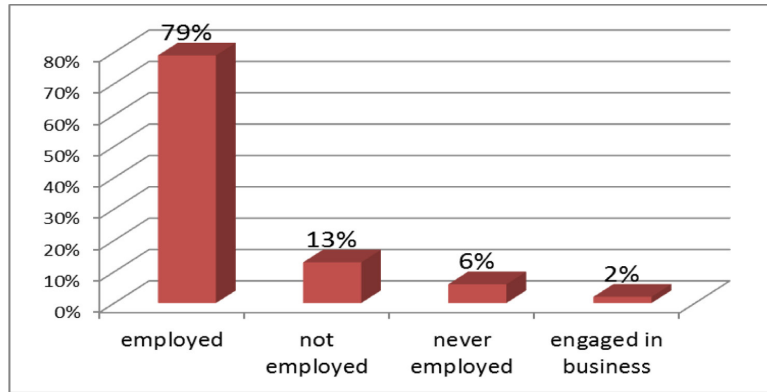


Figure 4. Employment data

As regard to the item on whether their current employment was their first job, 48% (26) of the respondents answered Yes while 52% (28) answered No. Among the 43 who were employed the job positions the respondents had for their first job were 56% (24) for professional, technical or supervisory positions and 44% (19) for rank and file or clerical position (Table 2). This result is very encouraging considering that all the respondents graduated in college five years and below and yet most of them were already on regular/permanent status and holding professional, technical or supervisory position, a feat not common to other courses.

Table 2. Job information

First job?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	26	48
No	28	52
Job Assignment		
Professional/Technical/Supervisory	24	56
Rank and file	19	44

As to the waiting time before they land on their first job after graduating in college, 26% (11) answered in less than a month, 26% (11) in one to six months, 37% (16) in 7 to 12 months, 9% (4) in one year to less than two years and 2% (1) in 2 years to less than three years (Figure 5). This is again a very inspiring accomplishment of the Accountancy graduates as most of them were immediately hired in less than one year after graduation. This result implies that UIC Accountancy graduates are really employable since in a survey done by Asian Development Bank in Manila and Cebu in 2008, it takes a college graduate 1 year to find a first job and up to 2 years to find a permanent job.

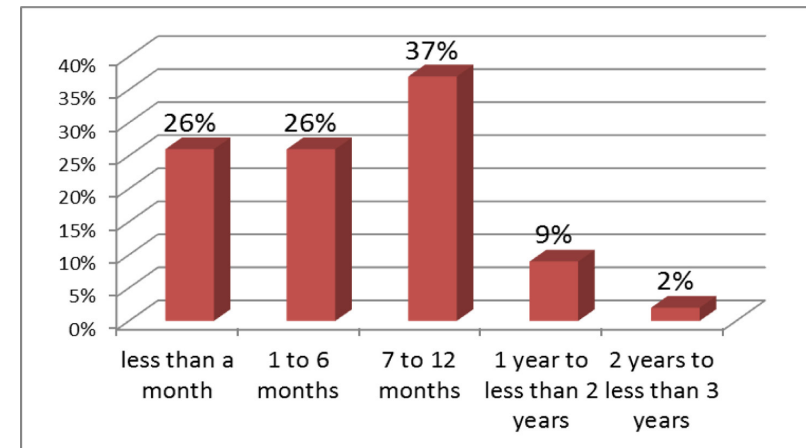


Figure 5. Waiting time prior to employment

As to how these respondents got their first job, 45% (19) answered as walk-in applicants, 32% (14) were recommended by someone, 12% (5) were introduced by friends, 2% (1) was arranged by school job placement office, 2% (1) respondent got through an advertisement and 7% (3) got from other means. This data could be construed that there is indeed a great demand for Accountancy graduates as they were hired mostly as walk-in applicants or just recommended by someone.

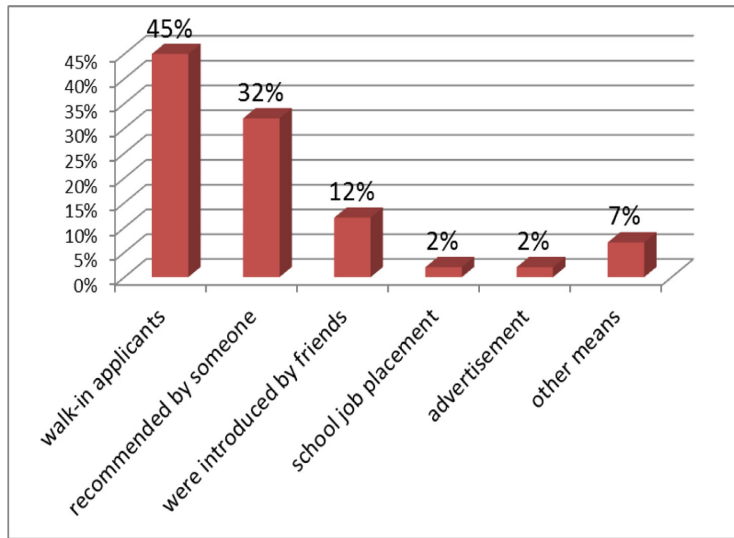


Figure 6. Means of finding their first job

The reasons of staying on their first job are shown in Figure 7. Twenty four (11) found their career as challenging, 24% (11) thought that their job was related to the course they had taken, 20% (9) believed that their job was related to their special skills, 13% (6) answered due to family influence, 7% (3) because of the proximity of their place of work to their residence, 4% (2) due peer influence, 4% (2) due to better salaries and benefits offered by their companies and 2% (1) due to other reasons.

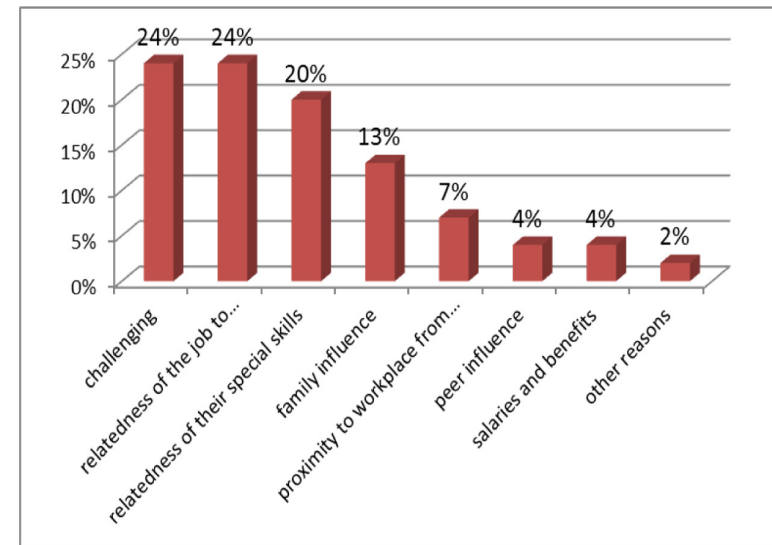


Figure 7. Reasons of staying on the job

The study also dealt with the respondents' employment in the different sectors of the accountancy profession where these BSA graduates are employed. As shown in Figure 8, 56% (24) worked with the commerce and industry sector, 21% (9) with the government, 18% (8) are in public practice and 5% (2) with the education sector. This data implies that Accountancy Graduates of UIC are more in demand in the commerce and industry sector and with the government sector. Only few of them worked in auditing and accounting firms as well as with the academic institution.

Most of the respondents also indicated that their first job was related to BS Accountancy course taken up in college 95% (41), and 5% (2) responded that their first job was not related to BS Accountancy.

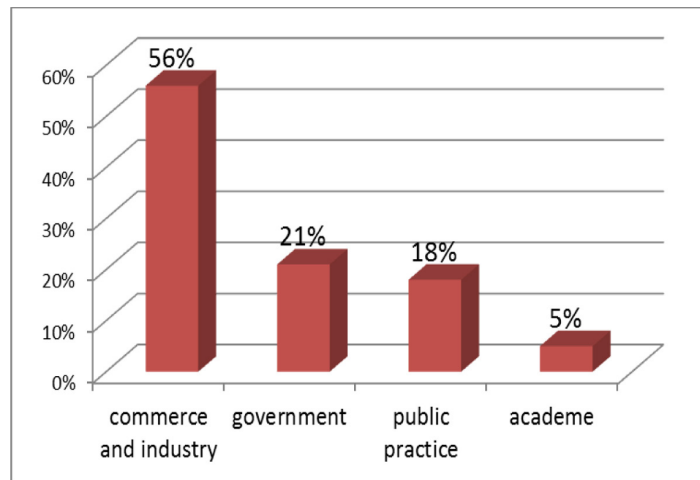


Figure 8. Sectors where respondents are employed

For those who changed jobs, most popular reasons why they left their first job were: for better salaries and wages 46% (10), 31% (7) for career challenge, 8% (2) for relatedness to their special skills, 5% (1) to be near to their residence and 10% (2) had other reasons such as expiration of contract and ministry (Figure 9). Likewise, when they were asked as to their job level position, majority or 62% (14) of those who changed jobs had professional, technical or supervisory positions, 32% (7) had rank and file or clerical positions and 3% (1) held managerial position.

As to how long they stayed with their first job before moving to their current job, 5% (1) answered less than a month, 36% (8) from one month to six (6) months, 8% (2) from seven (7) months to 11 months, 32% (7) from one to two years, 14% (3) from two to less than three years, and 5% (1) from three years to less than four years (Figure 10).

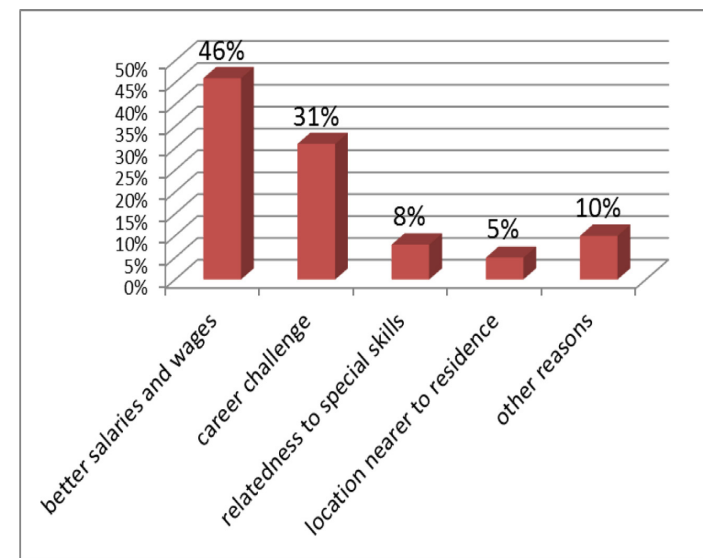


Figure 9. Reasons of changing job

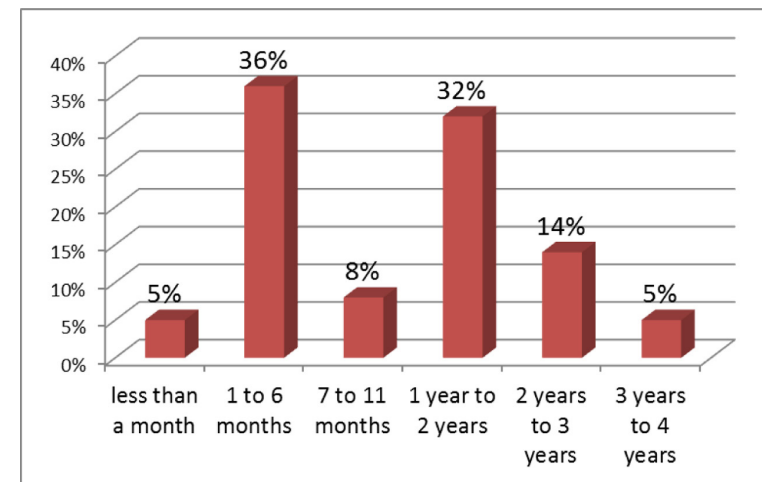


Figure 10. Period of staying with the first job

Skills Useful in their Job

The skills acquired in college that the participants found useful in their work are ranked as follows: the entrepreneurial skills, human resource skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, information technology skills and problem solving skills. The result of the survey could be interpreted that the Accountancy graduates applied some of the above-mentioned skills majority of the times in their actual workplace. The problem-solving skills of the participants may not be of use considering of the lower rank positions they have in their work place.

Apparently, entrepreneur is the aggressive catalyst for change in the world of business. Chief among the characteristics of an entrepreneur are personal initiative, the ability to consolidate resources, management skills, a desire for autonomy and risk-taking. Other characteristics are aggressiveness, competitiveness, goal-oriented behaviour, confidence, intuitiveness, reality-based actions, the ability to learn from mistakes, and the ability to employ human relations skills (Kuratko, 2012).

Evaluation on Administration, ABA Program, Faculty, Facilities and Student Services

To improve the services of the school in the future, the respondents were also asked to rate the performance of the different services of the school. Most of the Accountancy graduates (59%) rated the performance of the administration as satisfactory, while 39% rated it very satisfactory, and only 2% rated it excellent. The performance of the ABA Program was rated satisfactory by 52% of the respondents, and very satisfactory and excellent respectively by 44% and 4% of the respondents. The performance of the faculty was rated very satisfactory, satisfactory, and excellent by 54%, 40%, and 6%, respectively by the respondents. Of the respondents, 60% rated the school facilities satisfactory while 32% and 2% rated them very satisfactory and excellent. As for the student services, 65%, 29%, 2%, and 4% of the respondents found them very satisfactory, satisfactory, excellent, and poor, respectively (table 3).

Table 3. Performance rating of the administration, ABA program, faculty, facilities, and student services by the respondents

Aspect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Administration		
satisfactory	32	59
very satisfactory	21	39
excellent	1	2
ABA Program		
satisfactory	28	52
very satisfactory	24	44
excellent	2	4
Faculty		
satisfactory	22	40
very satisfactory	29	54
excellent	3	6
School facilities		
Poor	3	6
satisfactory	32	60
very satisfactory	17	32
excellent	1	2
Student services		
Poor	2	4
satisfactory	35	65
very satisfactory	16	29
excellent	1	2

The results of the study imply that graduates of the University of the Immaculate Conception were more likely to pass the CPA Board Examination and are highly employable as they were mostly employed with the various sectors especially with the Commerce and Industry and with the government sector. Only 18% were in public practice and 5% with the academe. Moreover, most of them despite of newly passing the board examination were offered technical or supervisory position. As to the BS Accountancy curriculum, most of the respondents find the curriculum relevant to their job.

On the basis of the findings emerging from this study it could be concluded that the Accountancy curriculum of the school was relevant to the current

employment requirements of the Accountancy graduates; that there was no problem for the graduates to find employment after graduation; their academic trainings particularly on entrepreneurial skills, technology skills and human relations skills were applied in their work, and that most of the graduates were fairly satisfied with the different services provided by the school while they were still in UIC.

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