

Tracer Study Of Master In Public Administration Graduates From 2011-2021 And Its Relevancy To Competency

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ABSTRACT:

In the contemporary labor market, aligning academic preparation with employment outcomes remains a significant challenge, as evidenced by the increasing prevalence of graduates occupying positions unrelated to their fields of study. Graduate tracer studies are essential tools for evaluating the relevance and quality of higher education programs in relation to labor market demands. This study investigated the employment status and professional trajectories of Master's in Public Administration (MPA) graduates from Laguna State Polytechnic University, Santa Cruz Campus (LSPU SCC), covering cohorts from 2011 to 2021. Utilizing a descriptive research design and probability sampling, the study analyzed the demographic profiles, employment characteristics, and competency levels of 60 respondents. Results indicated that the majority of graduates were married females aged 35–44, predominantly employed in local government positions with regular or permanent appointments. Key competencies identified included strong management skills, teamwork, personal responsibility, and integrity, with the highest conformity observed in management-related tasks. Notably, age demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with graduates' competencies, while gender and marital status showed minimal correlation. Furthermore, the place of employment exhibited a moderate positive correlation with competencies in abilities, knowledge, and work values. These findings underscore the importance of continuous curriculum evaluation and alignment with evolving workforce requirements to enhance graduate employability.

KEYWORDS: Graduate Tracer Study, Employment Outcomes, Public Administration Graduates, Competency Assessment, Higher Education Relevance

1. INTRODUCTION:

The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in October 1998 produced a pivotal declaration advocating for higher education systems that are responsive to the complex demands of the 21st century. The declaration reaffirmed the right to accessible, merit-based education for all, free from discrimination. It emphasized the vital roles of higher education institutions in developing qualified graduates, responsible citizens, and sustainable development. It also underscored the importance of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and international cooperation as guiding principles for global higher education reform [1]. The Master in Public Administration (MPA) program in the Philippines has evolved to meet the increasing demands of effective governance and public service in a rapidly globalizing and digitalizing world. Contemporary public administration education integrates theoretical foundations with practical competencies aimed at developing ethical, innovative, and transformational leaders capable of managing complex public and non-governmental organizations [2].

Philippine MPA programs, such as those offered by the University of the Philippines and other leading institutions, emphasize a multidisciplinary approach that includes public policy, financial management, organizational studies, and ethical leadership [3]. These programs are designed not only to equip students with technical skills but also to foster critical thinking, adaptability, and responsiveness to socio-political dynamics, which are essential in the context of global public administration [3]. Moreover, the integration of hybrid and flexible learning modalities reflects the commitment to accessibility and lifelong learning, key components of internationalized higher education [4]. In this context, the MPA curriculum is designed to cultivate public managers who are equipped to navigate governance challenges across various

levels effectively. It emphasizes key principles such as transparency, accountability, and sustainable development, aligning closely with international standards and frameworks. By focusing on critical capacity indicators, including human resources, knowledge management, physical and material resources, organizational and leadership capabilities, networking and linkage opportunities, as well as cross-border services [3], the program strengthens the Philippines' ability to actively engage in and contribute to global governance discourse and practice.

Most universities implement policies aimed at strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new linkages with the labor market to enhance the relevance of their academic programs. It is crucial to assess the adequacy of the training provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) in relation to graduates' career performance, including the development of essential knowledge, communication skills, and other competencies [5]. Graduate tracer studies serve as a vital evaluative tool to systematically collect data on alum demographics, employment status, underemployment, and the alignment of academic qualifications with industry requirements. These studies also examine leadership qualities and competencies acquired during study, thus providing evidence-based insights for institutional planning and program improvement [6], [7], [8], [9]

Globally, tracer studies have become an established practice for HEIs to monitor graduate outcomes and inform curriculum development. European universities, for instance, adopted tracer studies in the late 20th century to support program accreditation, demonstrate institutional distinctiveness, and align academic offerings with labor market demands. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the need for adaptive strategies in education and employment, as shifts in business operations and marketing necessitated new skills and competencies among graduates [10].

In the Philippine context, tracer studies are instrumental in identifying gaps between educational provisions and workforce expectations, thereby supporting continuous quality enhancement in higher education [11], [12]. Methodologically, rigorous tracer studies employ systematic processes involving survey design, implementation, and results dissemination to maximize data reliability and applicability [13], [14] proposes a seven-step methodological framework tailored for Philippine HEIs to optimize graduate tracer studies. [15] clearly the expected outcomes of graduate programs, including mastery of specialized knowledge, development of critical thinking, and enhancement of professional competencies, directly relate to the capacity-building of MPA graduates.

This research builds upon previous tracer studies with the aim of systematically profiling the demographic characteristics of graduates of the Master's in Public Administration (MPA) program. Specifically, it focuses on aspects such as gender, civil status, employment status, and salary grade, and examines their influence on key competencies, which include skills, knowledge, and work attitudes. The findings are intended to inform the refinement of curricular content and career guidance programs at Laguna State Polytechnic University, thereby enhancing the preparedness of MPA graduates to effectively manage their professional development and career advancement.

2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY:

This study utilized a cross-sectional retrospective survey design to systematically evaluate the employment outcomes and competencies of Master in Public Administration (MPA) graduates from Laguna State Polytechnic University – Sta. Cruz Campus. The research focused on alumni who completed their degrees between 2011 and 2021, allowing for an examination of their career trajectories over ten years. By employing a descriptive research framework, the study sought to provide a comprehensive snapshot of graduate profiles, competencies, and the perceived impact of academic preparation on professional success.

A total of 60 MPA graduates comprised the study sample, which was selected through probability sampling to ensure representativeness. Data collection was facilitated by means of a structured

questionnaire, which served as the primary instrument for gathering quantitative information. The questionnaire was organized into two main sections: the first section gathered demographic and educational background information from the respondents, while the second section evaluated their competencies across three domains: skills, knowledge, and work-related values. Furthermore, the instrument assessed the graduates' perceptions regarding the relevance of specific school-related factors, particularly those developed by Laguna State Polytechnic University, in relation to their job placement and the enhancement of their professional capabilities.

This methodological approach enabled an empirical analysis of the alignment between academic training and labor market demands, yielding valuable insights into the effectiveness of the MPA program in fostering essential competencies for public administration professionals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Demographic Profile of the MPA Graduates

The demographic profile of MPA graduates is crucial for understanding the current demographic characteristics of respondents, which will aid in addressing issues related to their journeys in their respective jobs. These respondents are university graduates with a Master's in Public Administration. Of 60 respondents, 22 (36.67%) are male, while 38 (63.33%) are female. Regarding civil or marital status, 20 (33.33%) were single, 33 (55%) were married, and 5 (8.34%) were single parents. Others, who were separated or divorced, accounted for 2 (3.33%). Notably, none of the respondents are widowed, which raises concern. In analyzing their age, it was found that 22 or 36.67% are ranging from 35-44 years old, which is considered to have the highest number of responses in the survey. In comparison, 6 or 10% of the respondents coming from the age range of 55 and above, who consider a few reactions as per the survey, are of concern.

[16] examined the possible relationship between age and gender in enrollment in graduate programs at North Georgia University, where students are in their first, second, and third years. Study results indicated that student age had a statistically significant impact on the status of pursuing their education. Older students scored at higher academic levels of achievement on the professional subjects assessment than younger students. Student age did not impact scores for the cognate portion of the evaluation. Study results also indicated that student gender did not affect achievement scores on the assessment's professional or cognate portion. The results suggest a need to include gender sensitivity training for faculty and students, increased academic support for younger students, and educational workshops.

Employment background of MPA graduates

This study examines the employment histories of graduates from the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program. The research into the current employment status of the respondents elucidates essential guidelines for the enhancement of the MPA program at the university. The data presented in the table indicates that out of 60 respondents, all are employed within the local area, while none are employed internationally. Regarding current employment, 35 respondents, representing 58.33%, are engaged in governmental positions, 18 respondents, or 30%, are employed in the private sector, 3 respondents, or 5%, are engaged in non-governmental organizations, and none, or 0%, are unemployed. Furthermore, it has been observed that 12 respondents, equivalent to 20%, are categorized as job order employees in their current positions, 15 respondents, or 25%, occupy contractual roles, and 33 respondents, or 55%, hold regular or permanent positions within their respective organizations.

Therefore, it revealed that most MPA graduates were female, married, and aged 31 to 40 years, with the majority holding permanent government positions. A significant proportion were employed in the public sector, predominantly at Salary Grade 18 or above, reflecting mid- to upper-level roles. These findings

were also reflected [6] in the fact that most graduates were promoted to higher management positions and practiced their learned attributes to a very great extent.

Table 1. Level of Competency of MPA Graduates in terms of Skills

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	REMARKS
1. Organize the execution of activities.	3.38	0.437	Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
2. promote innovation in working methods to optimize production.	3.12	0.511	Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
3. Carry out management processes (analytic accounting, cost control, budget, plans, reporting, etc.),	4.01	0.55	High Level of Compliance	Substantially Surpassed Standard
4. Possess good communication skills,	3.19	0.610	Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
5. Listen to understand, with curiosity instead of defensiveness	3.27	0.523	Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
Average	3.39		Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard

Table 1 illustrates the competency levels of MPA graduates across various skill domains. Significantly, the capacity to perform management processes—including analytic accounting, cost control, budgeting, planning, and reporting—achieved the highest mean score of 4.01 (SD = 0.552), reflecting a high degree of proficiency that considerably surpasses the anticipated standard. This finding is consistent with previous studies that stress the essential role of financial and managerial competencies in proficient public administration. [2], [17], [18]. Conversely, the competency associated with promoting innovation in work methodologies to enhance production attained the lowest mean score of 3.12 (SD = 0.511), indicating a moderately high yet relatively lower level of proficiency. This implies that although graduates have acquired fundamental skills, there remains an opportunity for advancement in cultivating innovative practices, a challenge that is corroborated by the literature concerning public sector innovation capacity. [17], [18]. The overall aggregated mean competency score of 3.39 indicates that graduates possess a moderately high skill level, exceeding the expected standard, thereby supporting the effectiveness of the MPA curriculum in preparing graduates for complex governance tasks.

Table 2. Level of Competency of MPA Graduates in terms of Knowledge.

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	REMARKS
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1. Work with other members in the organization to analyze and apply work information.	4.11	0.672	High Level of Competence	Substantially Surpassed Standard
2. Ask relevant questions that generate new ideas and advance the organization's thought process.	4.65	0.443	High Level of Competence	Substantially Surpassed Standard
3. Seek opportunities to increase access and awareness of resources to improve work efficiency.	4.41	0.510	High Level of Compliance	Substantially Surpassed Standard
4. Participate in improving knowledge management services.	3.32	0.619	Moderately High level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
5. Confident in the overall effectiveness of work assignment	3.20	0.574	Moderately High level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
Average	3.94		Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard

Table 2 presents the competency levels of MPA graduates in the domain of knowledge. The highest-rated indicator—"asking relevant questions that generate new ideas and advance the organization's thought process"—achieved a mean score of 4.65 (SD = 0.443), reflecting a high level of proficiency that substantially exceeds the expected standard. Conversely, the indicator measuring "confidence in the overall effectiveness of work assignment" received the lowest mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.574), indicating a moderately high competency level that still surpasses the anticipated benchmark. The overall average competency score in knowledge was 3.34, signifying a moderately high level of knowledge competence among graduates. These results suggest that while graduates excel in critical inquiry and innovative thinking, there remains potential to enhance their confidence in task effectiveness further, consistent with findings in public administration competency research [6], [10], [18].

Table 3. Level of Competency of MPA Graduates in terms of Work Values

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	REMARKS
1. Work in a good team to achieve organization's goal	4.13	0.682	High Level of Competence	Substantially Surpassed Standard
2. Take responsibility for the work that is performed.	3.09	0.503	Average high level of competence	Met Standard

3. Has the ability to achieve higher results in healthy competition with co-workers.	3.21	0.594	Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
4. Provides personal responsibility, relying on morality and with great integrity.	3.52	0.611	Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard
5. Help solve social problems, contribute to the development of the organization	3.08	0.508	Average high level of competence	Met Standard
Average	3.41		Moderately high level of competence	Surpassed Expected Standard

Table 3 shows the work-related values that contribute to meeting the demands of the present employment of the graduates. It shows that working in a good team to achieve the goal of the organization got the highest weighted mean of 4.13, and standard deviation of 0.682, followed by the indicator, which states that provision of personal responsibility, relying on morality, and with great integrity has a weighted mean of 3.52. Helping to solve social problems and contributing to the organization's development got the lowest weighted mean of 3.08. Indeed, these and the other work values have contributed to the respondents' ability to meet the demands of their present employment.

According to Schwartz's theory, there are ten motivationally distinct types of values alongside with their goals that tend to be universal: (1) Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources; (2) Achievement: personal success; (3) Hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself; (4) Stimulation: excitement, novelty, challenge in life; (5) Self-Direction; (6) Universalism; (7) Benevolence; (8) Tradition; (9) Conformity; (10) Security: safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of itself [19], [20], [21].

Table 4. Relationship of Respondents' Demographic Profile to their Competencies

PROFLE	COMPETENCY	R-VALUE	STRENGTH OF CORRELATION	P VALUE (2-TAILED)	HO	REMARKS
Age	Skills	0.617	Positive Strong Correlation	< 0.01	Reject	Significant
	Knowledge	-0.101	Negligible Correlation	> 0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Work Values	-.0457	Low Negative Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
Sex	Skills	-0.430	Low Negative Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Knowledge	-.0012	Negligible Correlation	> 0.01	Accept	Not Significant

	Work Values	-0.027	Negligible Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
Civil Status	Skills	-0.337	Low Negative Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Knowledge	-0.009	Negligible Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Work Values	-0.132	Negligible Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant

Table 4 presents the analysis of the relationship between respondents' demographic profiles and their competencies. Among the demographic variables, only age demonstrated a statistically significant association with skills, evidenced by a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.617, indicating a strong positive correlation. This relationship was significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis that posits no significant correlation between age and competency level. Conversely, other demographic variables such as sex and civil status showed no significant correlation with competencies, as their computed correlation coefficients exceeded the p-value threshold and were interpreted as negligible.

Supporting these findings, researchers reported that graduates' perceptions of their knowledge and skills were closely tied to their work experience, emphasizing that competencies are best evaluated through practical application. Their study highlighted communication skills as a frequently cited competency, with nearly 40% of participants affirming adequate development in speaking, listening, and writing abilities after years of study. This aligns with [22] the assertion that communication and collaboration are critical competencies for the modern workforce. However, a disconnect remains, as employers often express dissatisfaction with employees' interpersonal and communication skills.

Further, [23] identified nine competency dimensions: skill assessment, intellectual skills, service efficiency, learning orientation, promotive nature, empowerment, team building, cognitive competency, and administrative competency in evaluating employee performance in the banking sector. Notably, performance gaps were observed in empowerment, team building, cognitive competency, and administrative competency, suggesting the need for targeted interventions such as training and personality development programs to bridge these gaps.

Table 5. Relationship of Respondents' Employment Background to their Competencies

PROFIL E	COMPET ENCY	R- VALUE	STRENGHT OF CORRELATIO N	P VALU E (2- TAILE D)	HO	REMARKS
Place of Work	Skills	0.387	Positive Moderate Correlation	< 0.01	Reject	Significant
	Knowledge	0.499	Positive Moderate Correlation	< 0.01	Reject	Significant
	Work Values	0.399	Positive Moderate Correlation	< 0.01	Reject	Significant
Present Employom	Skills	0.333	Weak Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant

ent	Knowledge	-0.397	Negative Weak Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Work Values	0.453	Positive Moderate Correlation	>0.01	Reject	Significant
Status of Appointment	Skills	0.432	Weak Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Knowledge	0.411	Weak Correlation	>0.01	Accept	Not Significant
	Work Values	0.782	Positive Strong Correlation	< 0.01	Reject	Significant

Table 8 illustrates the relationship between the employment background of MPA graduates and their competencies. The variable "place of work" exhibited statistically significant positive moderate correlations with all competency domains: skills ($r = 0.387$), knowledge ($r = 0.499$), and work values ($r = 0.399$). Conversely, the respondents' present employment status showed weak and negative correlations with skills ($r = -0.333$) and knowledge ($r = -0.397$). Regarding the status of appointment, weak positive correlations were observed with skills and knowledge. In contrast, a strong positive correlation was found between status of appointment and work values ($r = 0.782$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis for this variable.

These findings are consistent with [24] those reported by, who reported that approximately 15% of graduates acknowledged acquiring time management skills and adaptability, competencies that are integral to contextual performance. Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility emerged as a critical competency, especially in teaching practice. The top competencies identified among 2019 graduates underscore the importance of personal adaptability and learning competence in workplace success.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The analysis of MPA graduates' competencies revealed that demographic factors such as age, gender, and civil status do not significantly influence their skills, knowledge, or work values, indicating that professional capabilities are mainly independent of these personal characteristics. In contrast, the graduates' place of work exhibited a significant moderate positive correlation with all competency domains, emphasizing the critical role of organizational context in shaping their professional development. Additionally, a strong positive relationship was found between the status of appointment and work values, suggesting that job stability fosters stronger adherence to ethical and professional standards. Graduates demonstrated high proficiency in management-related skills, including budgeting, planning, and reporting, while competencies related to innovation and production optimization were comparatively lower, highlighting areas for further enhancement. Among work-related values, teamwork emerged as the most influential factor contributing to job performance, followed by personal responsibility and integrity; however, contributions to social problem-solving and organizational development were less emphasized, indicating opportunities to strengthen graduates' civic engagement and organizational commitment.

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. There is no significant relationship between age and competency among MPA graduates; hence, the null hypothesis regarding this variable is rejected.

2. Demographic variables such as sex and civil status do not exhibit significant correlations with competencies, as their computed values exceed the significance threshold and indicate negligible relationships.
3. The place of work of MPA graduates shows a statistically significant positive moderate correlation with all measured competencies—skills, knowledge, and work values—highlighting its influence on professional development.
4. A strong positive correlation exists between the status of appointment and work values, justifying the rejection of the null hypothesis and underscoring the importance of employment status in shaping graduates' work ethics and values.

In light of the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The institution should conduct further research into graduates' behavioral patterns and develop targeted management strategies to mitigate any negative impacts on their professional performance and work habits.
2. Continuous professional development initiatives, including seminars, workshops, and training programs, should be implemented to enhance graduates' morale, skills, and productivity in adapting to workplace demands.
3. Employers are encouraged to establish robust monitoring systems and policies to assess and support the development of graduates' competencies, transforming potential inefficiencies into opportunities for growth.
4. To address the limitation of this study's scope, future research should be expanded to include multiple campuses, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of graduates' competencies across diverse contexts.
5. It is recommended that quantitative findings be complemented with qualitative data from graduates and stakeholders to enrich the analysis and strengthen the validity of the results through methodological triangulation.

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