

# Industry-Partners' Preferences for Graduates: Input On Curriculum Development

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## Abstract

This study was conducted in support to the curriculum development of the Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) - Batangas. The findings will be used to strengthen its program offerings and ensure its relevance to the needs of the industry-partners of the university through asking their preferences of skills and values for graduates as employees. Descriptive type of research was used in the study. Findings revealed that employers have very high standards in choosing their prospective employees that the Higher Education Institutions must provide to their students like competencies in technical skills with relevant knowledge in research, communication skills, computer skills and leadership skills while entrepreneurial skills obtained the least. Work attitude and behavior of the employees are also important aspects of employment skills that should always be integrated in all curricula such as valuing commitment, loyalty, high sense of professionalism with moral integrity as well as the significance of being result-oriented, trainable and proactive individuals.

**Keywords**-Employment Skill, Job Preferences, Graduates, Curriculum Development, Lyceum of the Philippines University, LPU

## 1. Introduction

Curriculum of a certain program must be periodically assessed to ensure its relevance to the needs of the industry to prevent the mismatch between graduate competencies and those required by employers (Teijeiro et al, 2013). Curriculum development and instructional management serve as effective tools for meeting the present and future needs of the local and national communities (Valdez, 2012a). Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) – Batangas as an Autonomous University seeks to enhance the curricular offering of each program through engaging in different meetings with the faculty members, students, alumni as well as the industry-partners to solicit their opinions and ideas that will provide significant contribution to the development of the curricula.

Involvement of the industry-partners in revising the curriculum is very much needed to provide their viewpoints and preferences which are being considered noteworthy confirmation of the efforts of the university in developing relevant knowledge, values and skills to the graduates anchored in the Bloom's Taxonomy of domains of learning domains. The three domains of educational activities or learning (Bloom, 1956) identified include the cognitive domain which involves mental skills or *Knowledge*, affective refers to growth in feelings or emotional areas like *attitude or self* and psychomotor for manual or physical skills. The school system prepares students for future occupations, develop their skills and provide them with the required knowledge, values and attitudes for the profession (Valdez, 2012b).

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Suitable skills and attributes have always been an important part of effective and successful participation in the tourism workplaces (Wang, et al 2009) while well-performed skills are the selling values/attributes that employers looking for in the engineering entry level jobs (Yusoff, et al, 2012).

The application of these learning activities supports the demands of the industries to qualify for a certain position in the organization. Employers spend most of their time dealing with employees, for which excellent communication skills are essential (Zaharim, et al, 2012). Drawing on the results of a survey into the workplace oral communication needs and uses of business graduate employees, it is argued that undergraduate experience in formal presentation only is inadequate preparation for oral communication in the workplace (Crosling and Ward, 2002).

According to the experts that the most relevant competencies in the labour market are predominantly of the systemic type, i.e. transferable personal competencies, to the detriment of more instrumental competencies related to capacities and graduate education (Teijeiro et al, 2013). Employers in the engineering firm seem to be more interested in graduates who have high level of competency and sufficient knowledge of science and engineering principles (Yusoff, et al, 2012). Universities must change their traditional focus and make a special effort to help their students to develop those competencies that best foster employability (Teijeiro et al, 2013).

Universities are organisations that perform a key role within contemporary societies by educating large proportions of the population and generating knowledge (Perkmann, 2013). Among all potential interactive linkages, companies can directly cooperate with or acquire research results from academic institutions, financially support academic research, and hire students, graduates, and researchers etc. to enrich their innovation capabilities. The potential positive effects of academia-industry linkages for innovation and for economic growth motivate governments in many countries to actively promote such linkages (Liu, 2009).

Insights from industry-partners are essential input to the development of program curriculum in order to determine the concerns of the employers regarding the required qualifications of the graduates. They are part of the Board of Directors in the process of reviewing the curricula of each college to match its content to the requirements of the industry.

Preferences of the Industry-partners were categorized based on the Bloom's concept of Learning Domains. Cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning domains are important ingredients of quality instruction that define the substance and effectiveness of teaching and learning process of acquiring technical skills to prepare them for employment. Technical skills refer to the knowledge and abilities that an individual should have to carry out the tasks associated with the position (Ahmed, 2012). Amongst the suggestions to improve the employment prospects of graduates is a marketing strategy which places greater emphasis upon the graduates' practical skills, level of commitment and ability to deliver high levels of service (Sparks & Bradley, 1994). Graduates must be able to market themselves by performing good employability skills especially technical skills (Yusoff, et al, 2012).

Moreover, affective skills is being considered as nontechnical in nature which have their roots in psychology, human behavior, sociology, and pertain to a broader range of characteristics involving personality types, social interaction abilities, communication, and personal habits where skills are essential because it shows the way people think, perceive, and react in the working environment (Ahmed, 2012). Behavioral component implies the individual's readiness to react against environmental stimuli (Mobashshernia & Aghaahmady, 2010). Values education aims to develop skills for rational thinking and value judgment in order to effect behavior change in the

students (Navarra & Alimen, 2009). Demonstrating a well-characterized attitude in an organization would lead to a better way of achieving success closer to reality.

The main focus of this study is to obtain substantial information from the Industry-Partners regarding their preferences for graduates in terms knowledge, values and skills to become part of their growing organizations. The result of the findings will serve as significant insights to the development of the curriculum of each program.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to seek some insights from the industry-partners of the Lyceum of the Philippines University regarding their preferences for graduates as employees along with the three learning domains. The findings of the study will serve as substantial input to the curriculum development of the University.

## **2. Materials and Method**

Descriptive type of research method was utilized in the study wherein 14 employers from different sectors of industry were invited to participate in the survey. Self-made questionnaire was used as the data gathering instrument which was validated by the Director for Research and Statistics of the University and the Vice President for Academic and Research. Simple frequency count and weighted mean were the statistical tools used to interpret and analyze the data gathered from the survey.

The questionnaires were administered during the Industry-Linkage Recognition Rites which was held in the Lyceum of the Philippines University last June 21, 2013 as one of the major events of Placement, Alumni and External Relations (PAER) office headed by the Executive Director, Dr. Leon R. Ramos, Jr. who made the administration of the questionnaires possible to the invited industry-partners of the university. Short interview with the employers was also conducted to substantiate the answers from the survey.

To interpret the result of the industry-partners' preferences for graduates, the respondents were offered five options. To arrive at a verbal description of each item, the arbitrary numerical guide was followed:

<b>Weight</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>	<b>Holistic Description</b>
5	4.49 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
4	3.50 – 4.49	Agree	High
3	2.50 – 3.49	Moderately Agree	Average
2	1.50 – 2.49	Disagree	Low
1	1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

## **3. Results and Discussion**

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of employer-respondents in terms of type of industry.

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Employer-Respondents in terms of Type of Industry**

Type of Industry	Percentage (%)
Engineering/Manufacturing	14.29
Business/Service Institution (Bank, Insurance, Others)	21.43
Health Related Services	14.29
Marine Industry	14.29
Hospitality Industry	21.43
International Internship	7.14
Non Government Organization	7.14

There were 21.43 percent of the industry-partners who came from business/service sector and another 21.43 percent from hospitality industry followed by 14.29 percent each for engineering and manufacturing, health related services and marine industry while international internship and non-government organizations consist the least group with 7.14 percent each. These are the types of industry being served by the on-the-job trainees of the Lyceum of the Philippines University through the assistance of the Internship office. The respondents who participated in the survey were potential employers of the LPU graduates. There would be a possibility that they could absorb the interns of the university after the on-the-job training and graduation. Lamancusa (2008) emphasized that Industry should be involved in all phases of the education process (curriculum design, advisory board, project sponsors, visiting lectures, faculty experiences, financial support).

Table 2 presents the LPU Industry-Linkage preferences for graduates as employees in terms of knowledge.

**Table 2: Industry-Linkage Preferences for Graduates as Employees in Terms of Cognitive Domain**

My company prefers graduates...	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
who are competent in their field of work/discipline	5.00	Strongly Agree
who have relevant knowledge and skills in research	5.00	Strongly Agree
who can speak and write English well	5.00	Strongly Agree
who are knowledgeable in computer operations/ applications	5.00	Strongly Agree
who have entrepreneurial skills	4.79	Strongly Agree
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.96</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

The industry-partners have very high regards in the competence of the graduates in terms of the relevance of their knowledge and skills in research and work discipline, communication skills, computer skills while entrepreneurial skills obtained the least though with the same level of verbal description of Strongly Agree. Being competent in their field of work/discipline means that the employees must have the ability to control and operate the things in the environment (Pring and Roco, 2012).

Theories of cognition have increasingly permeated instructional research and shaped instructional practices (Patel et al, 2009). Research capability of the graduates is another skill that needs to be nourished and strengthened among college students to prepare them in an environment that requires critical and analytical type of work or responsibilities wherein good command of English is also a requirement. Writing research reports also involves computer applications. Meanwhile, expertise in their respective discipline requires them to be technically competent in all facets of their field.

Table 3 presents the LPU Industry-Linkage preferences for graduates as employees in terms of affective domain.

**Table 3: Industry-Linkage Preferences for Graduates as Employees in Terms of Affective Domain**

<b>My company prefers graduates...</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
who are loyal and committed to their works/functions	5.00	Strongly Agree
who can assume responsibilities as team members and be a good leaders in the future	5.00	Strongly Agree
who possess strong moral values as required by the industry	5.00	Strongly Agree
who practice high sense of professionalism and with moral integrity	5.00	Strongly Agree
who can easily adapt the culture of the organization	4.93	Strongly Agree
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.99</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

The industry-partners strongly preferred employees who are loyal and committed to their works and functions; who can assume responsibilities as team members; who possess strong moral values as required by the industry; who practice high sense of professionalism while employees who can easily adapt the culture of the organization obtained the least. The composite mean score of 4.99 implies that the respondents were very much preferred employees with high positive attitude towards work.

The social aspiration is quite important and a common stereotype would equate graduates with “know-how” but knowledge and skills alone do not imply their right use; and right intentions that lack a commitment to overcome real technical problems are incomplete (Lynch et al, 2009). The affective learning is essential in balancing the application of knowledge and skills into a work environment where demonstration of right attitude and behavior is always necessary. Addressing the issues of affective learning in the development of curriculum always make sense in shaping the character of the students towards an end of producing graduates into a responsible employees.

Table 4 presents the LPU Industry-Linkage preferences for graduates as employees in terms of psychomotor domain.

**Table 4: Industry-Linkage Preferences for Graduates as Employees in Terms of Psychomotor Domain**

<b>My company prefers graduates...</b>	<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
who are proactive individuals and can suggest new ideas that will improve the tasks assigned to them	5.00	Strongly Agree
who are trainable or willing to be trained for more responsibilities	5.00	Strongly Agree
who can be cooperative team players	5.00	Strongly Agree
who can carry all their responsibilities with ease and with less instruction from their superior	5.00	Strongly Agree
who are result-oriented individuals with high regards towards the achievement of company’s mission	5.00	Strongly Agree
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>5.00</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

Employers preferred graduates who are proactive and can suggest new ideas for the benefit of the organization; trainable or willing to be trained for more responsibilities; cooperative team players; who can carry all responsibilities with ease and result-oriented individuals with high regards toward the achievement of company's mission. The composite mean score of 5.00 implies that the industry-partners of LPU have very high preference on the application of knowledge, values and skills of the graduates in terms of psychomotor domain.

The over-all assessment of the industry partner was 4.98 and rated Strongly Agree. It was found out that all of the enumerated statements were positively interpreted as strongly agree. However, graduates who can easily adapt the culture of the organization and who have entrepreneurial skills got the lowest mean value of 4.93 and 4.79 respectively.

Leadership development is now an integral part of the educational program of college students, with courses and activities running the gamut from curricular classes offered by a variety of academic disciplines (Posner, 2012). This is one of the applications of knowledge, skills and attitude learned from various student activities in college that will serve as their strong foundation to become future leaders and successful team players on their respective fields. Employers are looking for leadership capability of the graduates who are easily to be trained, cooperative and proactive individuals

#### **4. Conclusion**

Industry-partners are very much willing to share their inputs to the academic community in order to set the objectives of the HEIs aligned to their needs. The curriculum should be designed to prepare the graduates and demonstrate the core competencies expected of them in the workplace (Valdez, 2010). The industry-partners have very high regards in the competence of the graduates in terms of the relevance of their knowledge and skills in research and work discipline, communication skills, computer skills while entrepreneurial skills obtained the least.

They strongly preferred employees, who are loyal and committed to their works and functions; responsible team members; with strong moral values and high sense of professionalism. Employers preferred graduates who are proactive, trainable, cooperative team players and who can carry all responsibilities with ease and result-oriented individuals with high regards toward the achievement of company's mission.

The findings of the study would serve as significant input to design the course syllabi of the faculty members reflecting in the teaching and learning activities the strategies they will carry-out to address these needs of the industries and to prepare the students in a wide array of job opportunities through delivering quality instruction and developing updated curricula with inputs coming from the industry.

#### **5. Recommendation**

Management sectors reveal that the educational background of a graduate is an index of the quality of the graduate as an individual (Valdez, 2012b). Therefore, designing the future of the graduates is the main function of higher educational institutions through developing curriculum that would cater the demands of the corporate arena. Curriculum of each program should address the needs of the industries to prepare the students with wide array of technical skills through classroom-based or industry-based experiences.

Integration of values through highlighting the significance of cooperation and collaboration, leadership competence, integrity with high sense of responsibility may be reinforced in all classroom activities. These must be addressed to the accomplishment of course learning outcomes leading towards the realization of Performance Indicators (PI) based on the specific Student Outcomes (SO) of every Program Educational Objective (PEO). Evidence of the completion of the SO must be documented, assessed and evaluated to ensure that the PEOs are being addressed by the activities of the students inside and outside the campus. The demand for qualified graduates that matched to the specific requirements of the industry would result in the high employability rating of the LPU. Involving the students to the local, national and international academic, cultural and sports events would expose them to the different environment and experiences as well as to challenge their capability to show up their talents and skills. Acquiring social values from different classroom activities would shape the qualities and character of the students intended to take a role model in an organization.

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