

Employability of US Work and Travel (WAT) participants among tourism and hospitality management graduates

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Abstract

This study aims to assess the level of attainment of student outcomes of BSIHM specialized in Hotel and Restaurant Administration for academic year 2013 to 2017. Specifically, it determined the ability of the students to demonstrate hospitality skills, technological skills, communication skills, research skills, product conceptualization skills and respect for culture. The study used retrospective descriptive design with 40 HRA students as subject of the study. Grades were collected from the class records submitted by the faculty handling professional courses. Based on the result, students were able to achieve the 75 percent performance target of all student outcomes in all the professional courses that was assessed. Performance indicators was measured using the assessment tool such as Final Exam, Hands on Activity, Industry partners evaluation, revalida and oral defense. The result of this study will help the College in the preparation of the course plan in which area of the courses will be improved.

Keywords: tourism and hospitality management, employability, work and travel program

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1. Introduction

Employability plays an important role in the implementation of the Colleges' Learning and Teaching Strategies which becomes part of good learning practices. Students who engage in developing their employability are likely to be reflective, independent, and responsible learners. Providing innovative learning, modern teaching strategies and up-to-date assessment methods can improve students' understanding and help them to be engaged in 'deep' learning. This process helps to enhance graduates' employability. Employers' involvement in the education experience, such as, the process of placements, case studies, and being invited as guest lecturers, can help students appreciate the relevance of their course. It also gives them the initiative to learn how to apply theories and knowledge in the workplace in practical ways (Employability, 2011).

Additionally, employers prefer graduates who have undergone on-the-job training programs abroad, completed the whole program, or were partially engaged in the program. To employers students who have studied in other countries possess two graduate characteristics which are; first, skills related and second, personality. In terms of skills, spending time to study abroad becomes an indicator that candidates possess an advanced international orientation together with language skills. As to graduates' personalities, having the experience to study abroad, applicants manifest traits such as willingness and ability to deal with new situations, taking risks, and openness to new work experiences. Employers do not usually consider the idea of studying abroad to higher quality education (Humburg, Velden & Verhagen, 2013).

In 2009, the university initially participated in the US Summer Work Travel Program with just one agency. Over the years, the initiative has expanded to include multiple agencies, working collaboratively to fulfill the mission of providing quality education. The J-1 Summer Work Travel USA program is designed as a cultural exchange, offering international university students a unique chance to gain firsthand experience of life in the United States through summer work opportunities with American host companies. The J-1 Summer Work/Travel Programs present various positions in the United States, offering students opportunities to work in seasonal or temporary roles like housekeepers, hotel staff, waiters/waitresses, amusement park workers, resort area employees, lifeguards, and other fulfilling jobs within the hospitality and tourism sector. Participating in the program not only allows students to explore the USA and earn money for their daily needs but also provides an excellent opportunity to learn about US culture and enhance English language skills (Exchange Visitor Program, n.d.). With the opportunities offered by the different programs, this study will be beneficial to the CITHM students for options to come up with a wise decision of having a better venue for their On the Job Training. The result will help the parents to allow their son or daughter to participate in the US Summer Work Travel Program. The result of this study will also be used by the college and Strategic Communication and Alumni Affairs (SCAA) office as a good material for marketing collateral for LPU to attract more students to enroll in the Hospitality and Tourism Programs.

Objectives of the Study - This study aimed to determine employability of the graduates who participated in the US Work and Travel (WAT) Program. Specifically, it described the profile of the participants in terms age, sex, program, work assignment, nature of establishment and work location and year they joined WAT; determined the employment status of graduates, identified the school related factors relevant to the employability of the graduates who participated in the WAT Program.

2. Method

Research Design - This study used descriptive design to assess the employability of graduates who

participated in the US Summer Work Travel Program. The descriptive research attempts to describe, explain and interpret conditions of the present i.e. “what is”. The purpose of a descriptive research is to examine a phenomenon that is occurring at a specific place(s) and time. A descriptive research is concerned with conditions, practices, structures, differences or relationships that exist, opinions held, processes that are going on or trends that are evident (Descriptive Research, n.d.).

Respondents of the Study - The respondents of this study were 210 or 100 percent of CITHM graduates who participated in US Summer Work Travel Program from 2012-2014 based from the data taken from Internship office. The graduates were given nine months to accomplish the questionnaire sent thru e-mail and facebook, however, only 165 or 78.6 percent was retrieved.

Data Gathering Instrument - The study used a partially adopted questionnaire from CHED instrument used in tracing graduates as the main data gathering instrument in order to obtain the necessary information that pertains to the employability of graduates who participated in the US Summer Work Travel Program. Modification was done and used items that were applicable to the study.

Data Gathering Procedure - After the approval of the proposed topic by the research committee and the University President, the researcher administered the questionnaire to CITHM graduates who participated in US Summer Work Travel Program through the use of E-mail and Facebook.

Data Analysis - This study used Frequency Distribution, Percentage and Weighted Mean. Frequency Distribution and Percentage to present the profile of the graduates and employment status while Weighted Mean was utilized to determine the school related factors to job placement. Personal encoding was done and SPSS was used to interpret and analyzed the data gathered.

Ethical Considerations - The present study addresses certain ethical considerations. As previously noted, participants are required to provide written acknowledgment of their involvement in the research via a signed letter. Clear communication will be established with participants, ensuring they are fully informed about the study's objectives. Moreover, participants will receive assurance that their responses will be handled confidentially and utilized solely for academic and sensitive research purposes.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of the Graduates Profile

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	47	28.50
Female	118	71.50
Civil Status		
Single	143	86.70
Married	22	13.30
Year Joined WAT Program		
2012	47	28.50
2013	70	42.40
2014	48	29.10
Year of Graduation		
2013	47	28.50
2014	70	42.40
2015	48	29.10

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents in terms of gender, civil status, year graduated, year joined Work and Travel Program and Agency. In terms of gender, majority of the participants are female with 118 or 71.50 percent while 47 or 28.50 percent are male. Female graduates were more than male because the population of tourism and hospitality programs in LPU was majority female. As to their civil status, majority of the graduates are single with 143 or 86.70 percent while only 22 or 13.30 percent are married. Most of the

respondents are single because they are still of young age, between the age of 22 to 25 years old. Regarding the year they joined WAT Program, 70 or 42.40 percent joined in 2013, followed by 48 or 29.10 percent in 2014 and 47 in 2012. All of the participants graduated a year after they joined WAT Program.

Table 2*Employment Status*

Present Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regular or Permanent	63	38.18
Temporary	1	0.61
Casual	3	1.82
Contractual	87	52.73
Self-employed	7	4.24
Unemployed	4	2.42
Present Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Executives, Managers, Managing Proprietors and Supervisors	10	6.21
Professionals	13	8.07
Technicians and Associate Professionals	19	11.80
Clerks/Rank & File	103	63.98
Trades and Related Work	16	9.94
Major line of business of the company you are presently employed in	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Hotels and Restaurants and other Hospitality Business	126	78.27
Travel Agency and Transport	6	3.73
Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities	28	17.4
No Response	1	0.6
Place of Work	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local	72	44.72
Abroad	88	54.66
No Response	1	0.6
How long did it take you to land your first job?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 to 6 months	81	50.31
7 to 11 months	77	47.83
1 year to less than 2 years	3	1.86

Table 2.1 shows the employment status of WAT participants. Majority of the graduates are contractual with 87 or 52.73 percent followed by regular or permanent status with 63 or 38.18 percent. There are 7 or 4.24 percent self-employed, 4 or 2.42 percent are unemployed, 3 or 1.82 percent are casual and only 1 or 0.61 percent on temporary status. In summary, 97.58 percent of the graduates are employed while only 2.42 percent are unemployed. Majority of the graduates are on contractual status because they are still new in their job and mostly, workers abroad are on contract basis.

As to the present occupation of graduates, majority of them are in clerical/rank and file position with 103 or 63.98 percent followed by technicians and associate professionals with 19 or 11.80 percent. Trades and related work got 16 or 9.94 percent, 13 or 8.07 are professionals while only 10 or 6.21 percent are executives, managers, managing proprietors and supervisors. Most of the graduates are on clerical or rank in file position because they are new on their job and on the stage of proving their worth in the company.

In terms of the major line of business of the employer where graduates are presently employed, majority of the graduates are employed in hotels and restaurants and other hospitality business with 126 or 78.27 percent followed by real estate, renting and business activities with 28 or 17.4 percent. Only 6 or 3.73 are employed in travel agency and transport services and one with no response. This result is a good indication that graduates of LPU and those who joined the WAT program had a job that is related to their field of work.

Regarding the place of work of graduates, majority are working abroad with 88 or 54.66 percent while 72 or 44.72 are employed locally while one respondent did not respond at all. Greater percentage of the graduates who joined WAT program are working abroad because having such experience improve their skills and some of them were absorbed by the company where they were deployed during the WAT program.

As to the time they spend to land on their first job, 81 or 50.31 found their job within 1 to 6 months after

graduation while others had a job for 7 to 11 months with 77 or 47.83 percent. Only 3 or 1.86 percent got their job for 1 year or less than 2 years. The result indicates that joining WAT program is an advantage to job seeker because they were able to find a job for less than a year. They could say that joining the program is worth the cost because they can easily find a job and having experience in the actual place of work helps them to have advantage over other applicants. According to the study conducted by Erasmus University, 92% of employers are looking for personality traits found to be enhanced by study or training abroad and more than one in three participants in training abroad are offered a position at the enterprise where they do their traineeship (Branderburg, 2014).

Table 3.1.1
Curriculum and Instruction (GE)

General Education Subjects	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Mathematics	4.10	Relevant	1
2. Languages	3.37	Moderately Relevant	2
3. Natural Sciences	2.65	Moderately Relevant	3
Composite Mean	3.38	Moderately Relevant	

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Very Relevant; 3.50 – 4.49 = Relevant; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Relevant; 1.50 – 2.49 = Slightly Relevant; 1.00 – 1.49 = Not Relevant

Table 3.1.1 presents the curriculum and instruction for general education subjects with a composite mean of 3.38 and verbally interpreted as moderately relevant. Mathematics ranked first with the weighted mean 4.10, interpreted as relevant. It was followed by Languages (3.37) while the lowest in rank was the subjects Natural Sciences (2.65), both verbally interpreted as moderately relevant. Mathematics are relevant because these is being used not only on the job but also in everyday life. Mathematics holds evident significance in the professional realm, with a noted rise in jobs requiring mathematical skills according to the Select Committee on Science and Technology (2012). The assertion is that proficiency in mathematics, particularly in STEM subjects, opens the door to a diverse range of promising career opportunities. (Finegold, et al. 2011; Porkess, 2012).

Table 3.1.2
Curriculum and Instruction (Professional)

Professional Subjects	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Front Office Services	3.87	Relevant	9
2. Housekeeping Services	4.35	Relevant	3
3. Bartending	4.14	Relevant	7.5
4. Food and Beverage Service	4.22	Relevant	4
5. Commercial Cooking	4.39	Relevant	2
6. Baking and Pastry Production	4.21	Relevant	5
7. Banquet and Catering	4.49	Relevant	1
8. International Cuisine	4.16	Relevant	6
9. Travel and Tour Operations	4.14	Relevant	7.5
Composite Mean	4.21	Relevant	

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Very Relevant; 3.50 – 4.49 = Relevant; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Relevant; 1.50 – 2.49 = Slightly Relevant; 1.00 – 1.49 = Not Relevant

Table 3.1.2 lists down the curriculum and instruction for professional subjects with the composite mean of 4.21 and verbally interpreted as relevant. Based in the result, Banquet and Catering ranked first with 4.49 followed by commercial cooking with 4.39 and housekeeping with 4.35, all verbally interpreted as relevant. Banquet and catering are relevant and useful especially to those working in the restaurant. Knowledge in this course helps the graduates to easily find job specially an on-call job. Majority of the workers in catering business are on-call because of the nature of the business which is seasonal. Those who work in catering business have to remain wary of the seasonal fluctuations in business such as summer and Christmas. These brought them with substantially more customers than at other times of the year. This is one of the unique challenges for seasonal businesses that affect recruitment (Seasonal Workers, n.d.).

On the other hand, low results were on Travel and Tour Operations and Bartending (4.14), followed by front office services (3.87) and Front Office Services (3.87) ranked the lowest but it is still relevant. It shows that professional subjects are relevant on the job of graduates because they can really apply the knowledge and skills

they gained from the university. Universities and colleges offers professional courses are special courses that emphasize on professional development. It is specifically oriented toward professionals who wants to enhance their skills that will be useful for their specific work environment (Walcot, 2017).

Table 3.2.1*Personal and Social Traits (Faculty)*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Conducts himself in a dignified & professional manner	4.63	Excellent	2
2. Has awareness of institutional values	4.10	Very Good	6
3. Is fair and impartial to all subjects	4.20	Very Good	5
4. Expresses himself fluently and spontaneously	4.65	Excellent	1
5. Is enthusiastic, resourceful and creative	4.51	Excellent	4
6. Shows genuine interest in the students; awards deserving students	4.53	Excellent	3
Composite Mean	4.44	Very Good	

Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Excellent; 3.50 – 4.49 = Very Good; 2.50 – 3.49 = Good; 1.50 – 2.49 = Fair; 1.00 – 1.49 = Poor

Table 3.2.1 represents the personal and social traits of faculty members as school related factors related to employment with the composite mean of 4.44 and verbally interpreted as very good. Based on the result, the faculty member can express himself fluently and spontaneously topped on the rank with the weighted mean of 4.65 followed by conducting himself in a dignified and professional manner with 4.63 and both interpreted as excellent.

Professors and instructors can teach their students fluently and spontaneously because of the expertise they possess as part of their learning and training. As part of the institution's training and development, they attend training/ seminars and workshop provided by the institution and other professional organization. They are also holders of various TESDA national certification. Teachers/professors should be proficient in the language, appropriate body language, good presentation skills, positive motivation, sense of humor and most of all, interpersonal skills in order to become effective communicators and can effectively relate to their students during the conduct of class (Communication Skills, n.d). However, being fair and impartial to all subjects (4.20) ranked low followed by having awareness of institutional values (4.10) ranked the lowest but verbally interpreted as very good. Though this indicator ranked the lowest, still the faculty members possess a very good institutional value as can be seen by the students during their four-year residency in the institution. Awareness of these values helps the graduates to easily recognize or adapt to the good values that they possess.

Table 3.2.2 highlights the instructional competency of faculty with the composite mean of 4.33 and verbally interpreted as very good. Teachers conduct accurate & objective evaluation of student performance (4.91) ranked first followed by developing value and good principles in life among students (4.79) and both verbally interpreted as excellent. Faculty members have accurate & objective evaluation of student performance because there is available transmutation table as equivalent rating of the raw score that they get from their regular academic courses and practical exams. Rubrics are also utilized to have a fair evaluation of their performance. Assessment integrated with instruction is an extremely powerful teaching tool especially if it will be used as part of the learning process instead of in a summative role. At the end of a teaching process it ensures that students understand their lesson. According to research, helping students understand what is expected of them, and why, provide students the opportunity to participate actively in their own education. It also helps them to be responsible on their own learning and judge the quality of their work (Classroom Assessment, n.d).

Table 3.2.2*Instructional Competencies (Faculty)*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Has mastery of the subject matter	4.08	Very Good	6
2. Shows good command of the medium of instruction	4.00	Very Good	7
3. Makes use of various teaching aids	3.88	Very Good	8
4. Presents lessons using appropriate methods techniques	4.16	Very Good	5
5. Relates subjects to other fields & other life situation	3.87	Very Good	9

Table 3.2.2 ... continued

6. Inspires students to be self-reliant and disciplined	4.72	Excellent	3
7. Shows respect and consideration of students opinion and suggestions	4.59	Excellent	4
8. Conducts accurate & objective evaluation of student performance	4.91	Excellent	1
9. Develops value and good principles in life among students	4.79	Excellent	2
Composite Mean	4.33	Very Good	

Teachers making use of various teaching aids (3.88) ranked low and the item faculty relates subjects to other fields & other life situation (3.87) rank the lowest, both interpreted as very good. Faculty members do not excel on this area because majority of them do not have industry experience. They obtained their knowledge and skills through school learnings, immersions and training.

Table 3.3.1 presents the physical plant and facilities of LPU with the composite mean of 3.66, verbally interpreted as very good. Adequacy of study areas (4.15) ranked first followed by adequacy of space for outdoor educational activities: academic, social, physical, athletic, cultural, religious (3.98), both rated as very good. On the recent years, LPU built student areas where students can stay during their free time and study their lessons other than in library. The classroom's physical structure is a critical variable that affect student's learning and morale. Thier involvement in the process of creating their environment can empower them, develop community and increase motivation (Philips, 2014).

Ground and building (3.39) ranked low and provision of wholesome environment for learning (3.28) ranked the lowest both rated as good only. Having an environment that is conducive to learning helps the student to be motivated to study and therefore, excel in their subjects. The school's physical environment underscores the importance of providing a positive learning climate through safe, clean, and comfortable surroundings for students (Safe Supportive Learning, 2017).

Table 3.3.1
Physical Plant and Facilities

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Ground and Building.	3.39	Good	6
2. Provision of wholesome environment for learning	3.28	Good	7
3. Adequacy of classroom, fixtures, ventilation and lights	3.76	Very Good	3
4. Adequacy of hi-tech equipment such as projectors LCD projectors, TV, etc	3.53	Very Good	5
5. Adequacy of study areas	4.15	Very Good	1
6. Adequacy of facilities such as comfort rooms, drinking fountains, lockers, etc	3.55	Very Good	4
7. Adequacy of space for outdoor educational activities: academic, social, physical, athletic, cultural, religious	3.98	Very Good	2
Composite Mean	3.66	Very Good	

Table 3.3.2 presents the computer laboratories as part of the school facilities with the composite mean of 4.59. Updated computer facilities and program (4.84) ranked first and rated as excellent. It was followed by availability of laboratory technician (4.49) and availability of computers (4.44), ranked the lowest and both rated as very good. Computer laboratories are installed with various softwares needed in the class. One example of these softwares is Micros Opera system installed in one laboratory wherein students utilized the software for front office in preparation for their future job and for TESDA national certification. The integration of information technology (IT) applications has become a crucial aspect of hotel operations. As a result, hospitality schools strive to equip their graduates with the essential skills and tools required to thrive in an industry environment that is constantly evolving and advancing. Consequently, students in hospitality schools should receive enhanced preparation in utilizing spreadsheet and word processing programs, efficiently presenting data, employing point-of-sale systems, and analyzing numerical data with computers (Bilgihan, Berezina, Cobanoglu & Okumus, 2014).

Table 3.3.2*Computer Laboratories*

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Availability of Computers	4.44	Very Good	3
2. Updated Computer Facilities and programs	4.84	Excellent	1
3. Availability of Laboratory Technician	4.49	Very Good	2
Composite Mean	4.59	Excellent	

Table 3.3.3 shows the HRM/Tourism Laboratories as school related factor to job placement with a composite mean of 4.02 and rated as very good. Availability of Demo Lab with viewing equipment (4.64) topped on the rank and rated as excellent. It was followed by Hot Kitchen and Cold Kitchen with adequate equipment, tools and supplies (4.19) and laboratory custodians to assist the faculty and students are available (4.14), both rated as very good. Demo Lab is an important facility because with this, students can watch the video where they can follow the procedure of doing a specific task other than the demonstration made by the faculty.

According to Fitaihi (2016), Through kitchen or classroom labs, students can acquire the knowledge and training needed not only to secure employment but also to embark on a rewarding career filled with excitement. However, Front Office and Hotel Rooms for student simulation (3.65) ranked low, rated as very good while conduciveness to learning environment (3.45) ranked the lowest and rated as good only. Over the past five decades, learning environments have undergone significant transformations, primarily driven by advancements in communication and information technologies. The evolution began with the advent of personal computing and the Internet, leading to a continuous surge in innovations aimed at enhancing learning and instructional methods. While there has been extensive discourse on instructional paradigms and novel learning approaches, the widespread implementation of these ideas with substantial learning outcomes has been limited (Spector, 2014).

Table 3.3.3*HRM/Tourism Laboratories*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Availability of Demo Lab with viewing equipment	4.64	Excellent	1
2. Hot Kitchen and Cold Kitchen with adequate equipment, tools and supplies	4.19	Very Good	2
3. Laboratory custodians to assist the faculty and students are available	4.14	Very Good	3
4. Front Office and Hotel Rooms for student simulation	3.65	Very Good	5
5. Travel Bureau with Reservation System	4.05	Very Good	4
6. Conduciveness to learning environment	3.45	Good	6
Composite Mean	4.02	Very Good	

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The employed graduates who joined the Work and Travel program were 97.58 percent. Majority of them were female, single, joined the program in 2014, graduated a year. For the graduates employment status, majority were contractual, occupying rank and file/clerical position, employed in hotels and restaurant and other hospitality business, working abroad, found their job in less than a year. The school related factors relevant to job placement were curriculum and instruction (GE and professional courses), personal and social traits of faculty, instructional competency of faculty, physical plant and facilities, computer and HRM/Tourism laboratories. Intensive enrolment campaign the emphasize on international practicum may be prioritized by Strategic Communications and Alumni Affairs. Periodic review of curriculum maybe implemented to adapt with the current trends in hospitality education. CITHM professors without industry exposure may continuously undergo immersion program in order be updated of the current trends in the tourism and hospitality industry. Future researcher may conduct follow up study to further confirm the result of the study

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