A Tracer Study among Nursing Graduates of LPU-St. Cabrini School of Health Sciences, Inc. SY 2011-2016

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ABSTRACT

Employability of graduates is one of the success measures of higher educational institutions. A tracer study is done to monitor the status of its graduates and enhance institutional practices to achieve the educational objectives and contribute to the growing health needs of the community. For more than a decade, the Nursing Program of LPU−St. Cabrini School of Health Sciences, Inc. had produced graduates, majority of whom had landed successfully as practitioners working locally and abroad. This study primarily seeks to assess the educational experiences, employment, and achievements of graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduates of LPU−St. Cabrini School of Health Sciences, Inc. from batch 2011-2016. Majority (89.70%) of the Nursing graduates of LPU−St. Cabrini are female, single, and employed on a regular status as health practitioners in health facilities. The graduates attested that the college had prepared the graduates to perform as required for an entry-level practitioner with highly developed interpersonal relationship skill; and they believe that motivation to perform efficiently and effectively has been so far the best that they have achieved in learning.

Keywords: Graduate tracer, nursing, employability, program assessment, health facilities

INTRODUCTION

One of the success indicators of higher educational institutions (HEIs) is the quality of its graduates which is translated in terms of employability. Although there is no particular formula that will ensure success during the transition of graduates into employment (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2013), employability always measures their quality and value (Jayasingam, Fujiwara, & Thurasamy, 2016). In the past, nurses' employability had been a national problem as evidenced by the bulk of Nursing graduates employed outside the jurisdiction of its profession. Recently, the scenario changed its course, as employers struggle their way into the portals of the academe as they try to run after graduating students who will soon join the decreasing number of nurses in the workforce.

In the U.S., more than 3.1 million registered nurses are practicing the profession nationwide with a fast growth in its employment than most other occupations in 2018 (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2019). Between 2001 and 2004, there were 43,897 nurses who sought employment abroad, a number higher than the nurses who made their way into the workforce at the same time of the year after obtaining their licenses. During this period, despite an oversupply of nurses, there was an inadequacy in terms of nurse-patient ratio due to the underfunding in the health system and lack of health facilities. Report from a news agency even mentioned that around 200,000 nurses were unemployed in 2016 (Trines, 2018).

According to a recent report (Trading Economy, 2019), the unemployment rate in the Philippines dropped to 5.50 percent in the second quarter of 2018 from 5.70 percent of the previous year with an increase in the number of employed individuals by 625 thousand to 40.9 million. Unemployment rate in the Philippines averaged to 8.44 percent from 1994 until 2018, obtaining an all-time high of 13.90 percent in the first quarter of 2000 and a record low of 4.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2016.

Preparing students to be successful in their employment or job is basic to be highly competitive (Rosenberg, Heimler, & Morote, 2012) particularly now that organizations define the quality of workforce they need. For example, in other countries, employers expect graduates to be competent in specific soft skills like high quality of communication or interpersonal skills, foreign language acquisition and proficiency, ICT or technical skills, high spirit of teamwork, and specific personal attributes to achieve personal and professional objectives (Shafie & Nayan, 2010; Efendi, Chen, Nursalam, Indarwati, & Ulfiana, 2016).

Collaboration and periodic discussion with employers to verify the competencies and special knowledge needs in the labor market must be done through continuous communication (Donik, Pajnkihar, & Bernik, 2015).

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) leads in the monitoring of the quality of programs in partnership with HEIs (Concha & Tiongco, 2015). According to the collaborative Tracer Study done by CHED, FAPE, and ECC (2012), private institutions reached more than 80 percent of their graduates joining the workforce. Outcomes of the long years of preparing students academically can be summarized through the tracer studies done by the HEIs. A tracer study is a concrete documentation of the graduates' professional journey. As a tool, it is a very helpful device that gathers significant information or feedback on the graduate's milestone as professionals (Gines, 2014; Schomburg, 2016).

A number of literatures (Abiad, Argente, Sanchez, & Guhit, 2011; Banzuela-de Ocampo, et al., 2012; Celis, Festijo, & Cueto, 2013; Ramirez, Cruz, & Alcantara, 2014; Sembatya, & Ngobi, 2015; Janer, Deri, Dio, Marbella, & Ricafort, 2015) attempted to explore the development of student competencies and described graduates' experiences as they move into the reality of the workplace.

For more than a decade, the Nursing Program of LPU–St. Cabrini School of Health Sciences, Inc. had produced graduates, majority of whom had landed successfully as practitioners working locally and abroad. Locally, its graduates provided answers to the need of the nursing workforce in most hospitals in the CALABARZON area. As the initial program offering of the school in 2002, the Nursing Program stood to put the name of the institution in the streamline of the educational arena. Since then, LPU–St. Cabrini served as a home to students aspiring to become professional nurses. The initial tracer study done in SY 2006 – 2010 revealed a 92 percent employability rate of its graduates. Since then, no follow-up study was done to monitor the status of its graduates, thus, this study is pursued. More than just a compliance, doing the tracer study is a timely endeavor to make a follow-up documentation of the life of the Nursing graduates of LPU–St. Cabrini. The result of the study is expected to help the institution in enhancing and innovating its practices that will be useful in achieving its educational objectives and be responsive to the growing health needs of the community.

Objectives of the study

The study aimed to assess the educational experiences, employment, and achievements of graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program of LPU–St. Cabrini School of Health Sciences, Inc. from batch 2011 – 2016. Specifically, this study was carried out to seek answers to the following objectives:

1) Describe the demographic profile of graduates in terms of gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, and achievement;
2) Describe the current status of employment and work position of graduates;
3) Analyze graduates' assessment of the program and learning;
4) Determine the usefulness of the learned competencies on the job;
5) Assess the usefulness of the institutional core values on the job; and
6) Provide recommendations to enhance the competitive edge of LPU–St. Cabrini College of Allied Medicine graduates.

METHOD

To provide framework of the study, a descriptive quantitative research design was utilized. Characterization was based on the aspects related to respondent's profile, employment status and achievement, and educational experience.

The respondents of the study were 39 Nursing graduates of LPU–St. Cabrini School of Health Sciences, Inc. from 2011 – 2016 chosen through convenient sampling. By distribution, the highest respondents were those who graduated in 2012 with 25.64 percent followed by 2016 with 23.80 percent and then 2015, 2014, 2013, and 2011 with 12.82 percent. The number of respondents is too small considering the number of graduates, particularly in the years 2011 – 2014. There was difficulty in tracking the graduates since the college does not have a list of contact details of graduates, particularly female

graduates who may have changed their surnames and no longer bear their maiden names. Referral from their previous batchmates was also futile as some claimed they already lost contact with them.

The data was obtained using a modified survey questionnaire which was adapted from the CHED's Graduate Tracer Study (GTS). The modified instrument had undergone validity and psychometric property testing prior to its utilization. The reliability index using Cronbach Alpha results in a value of 0.981 for the entire questionnaire. Results of reliability test for the categories are 0.934 for assessment of the program, 0.972 for assessment of learning, 0.914 for usefulness of competencies in the first job, 0.942 for competencies after the first job, and 0.945 for usefulness of core values in the job. Cronbach Alpha measured the internal consistency of items in respective categories. Results show that items under each category have shared covariances and each of them measure the same underlying concept in the identified categories. With these results, it is concluded that the questionnaire is highly reliable.

The instrument is divided into six parts. Part 1 includes the educational background of the respondents and the reasons for pursuing the degree. Part 2 comprises eleven items on the assessment of the program that uses a 6-point semantic differential scale with description of *strongly agree* (6) to *strongly disagree* (1). Part 3 is a 14-item assessment on learning which uses the similar 6-point semantic differential scale with descriptions of *strongly agree* (6) to *strongly disagree* (1). Part 4 is a 22-item questionnaire on employment and work presented in a form of checklist. Some of the numbers which require specific answers were provided with spaces where respondents may write. Items 19 and 20 required responses regarding the eleven identified competencies learned in college and their usefulness in the first job and succeeding jobs (for those who have changed their jobs). Item 21 required rating the usefulness/applicability of the six core values learned in college. All three items were rated using a 6-point semantic differential scale with descriptions of *very useful* (6) to *not useful* (1). Part 5 comprised a 6-item checklist that pertains to achievement. Some items required additional information to justify previous answers. Part 6 sought general information regarding the respondents.

Data were collected in two ways. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed among graduates who were employed in nearby health facilities. Second, the survey questionnaire was uploaded in the web and sent through weblink.

Although personal information was required, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Data gathering, encoding, and safekeeping were personally attended by the researcher.

Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and weighted mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Graduates' Demographic Profile

Table 1. Demographic profile according to sex

	Frequency	Percent
Male	13	33.33
Female	26	66.67
Total	39	100.00

Table 1 indicates that there are more female respondents than males. For years, nursing is known to be a female dominated profession. Although at present, opportunities for employment are equally enjoyed by both male and female nurses, female nurses still occupy a greater portion of nursing positions.

Table 2. Demographic profile according to civil status

	Frequency	Percent
Single	31	79.50
Married	8	20.50
Total	39	100.00

Table 2 presents that majority or more than two-thirds (79.50%) of the respondents remained single. College students usually graduate at age 20 – 21 after which, they get engaged with their work, a period where they deal with personal and professional development and even aim for higher work or academic status which usually takes a few years. Some may even prepare getting a job outside the country, reason why settling down is not a priority. This result matches the report from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in 2017 in which there was around 3.60 percent decrease in marriages between 2014 – 2015 and even surprisingly, has decreased by 20.10 percent within a decade (Lazatin, 2018).

Table 3. Demographic profile according to highest educational attainment

	Frequency	Percent
College Degree	33	84.62
Master's Degree	6	15.38
Total	39	100.00

Table 3 shows that only a small percentage (15.38%) pursued and finished master's degree. In the same study, a number among the counterpart had enrolled in graduate studies, and a certain percentage still expressed their plan of enrolling in the near future. One of the reasons why graduates fail to pursue further studies is due to the cost of graduate education which may cause a financial burden considering the salary graduates are receiving in their job even if there is a promise of higher pay after earning a higher degree.

Current employment and position

Table 4. Present employment

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	35	89.70
No	4	10.30
Total	39	100.00

Table 4 presents that a little less than 90 percent were employed during the survey period. This number indicates a high employability rate for Nursing graduates. For those who were not employed, reasons were lack of experience because of not pursuing the Nursing career after graduation, did not look for a job, in the process of working on the requirement to work abroad and one refused to mention the real reason.

Table 5. Employment status

	Frequency	Percent
Regular/Permanent	25	64.10
Temporary/Contractual	7	17.90
Not applicable	7	17.90
Total	39	100.00

In Table 5, it is shown that more than half (64.10%) of graduates who were employed were on a regular or permanent status. They have been in their jobs for more than a year; meaning, they have passed the probationary period for a new employee. Currently, it is very evident that the Philippines lacks enough nurses to man the country's health facilities, one strategy of hospitals is to lessen the probationary period for new recruits. According to an interview with some Nursing Administrators, because of the competition of attracting nurses, the hospital has to offer a good package of benefits and putting them in a regular status is one good way to retain them.

Table 6. Present occupation

	Frequency	Percent
Health practitioners	28	71.80
Official government & special interest organization	3	7.70
Entrepreneur	3	7.70
Corporate executive/managers	1	2.60
Technicians and associate professional	1	2.60
Health educator	1	2.60
Educator/teacher/college instructor	1	2.60
Not applicable	1	2.60
Total	39	100.00

Table 6 indicates that as expected, most (71.80%) of them are working as health practitioners. They work as staff nurses, nurse managers and administrators, and technicians. It is expected that most licensed nurses prefer to be practitioners and gain specialization. This prepares them to qualify when they apply for work abroad.

Table 7. Nature of operation of the company/organization/institution

	Frequency	Percent
Hospital facility	30	76.90
Rural health unit/community health center	2	5.10
Education	2	5.10
Research	2	5.10
Not Applicable	2	5.10
Others	1	2.60
Total	39	100.00

It is shown in Table 7 that more than 75 percent of graduates work in a hospital facility. Among all clinical settings, hospital facilities require more nurses than any place such as in community centers or clinics. There are many choices for clinical expertise that hospitals can offer.

Table 8. First job

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	22	56.40
No	17	43.60
Total	39	100.00

Table 8 indicates that a little more than half (56.40%) of the respondents answered affirmatively that the current employment is their first job. When asked for the reason for staying in the job, career challenge, proximity to residence, salaries and benefits, and opportunities for personal development were mentioned respectively with career challenge as the main reason. Nursing as a career involves human interaction that requires a lot of decision-making. Dealing with real human experiences expects nurses to be caring, compassionate, and understanding no matter what circumstances they are in. Every human interaction is challenging because each one is a unique experience needing a special skill which nurses need to develop, sustain, and strengthen.

Table 9. Means of finding the first job

	Frequency	Percent
Response to advertisement	2	5.10
Arranged by school's job placement officer	1	2.60
As walk-in applicant	14	35.90
Recommendation by someone	9	23.10
Information from friends	3	7.70
Job fair	1	2.60
On-the-job-training	2	5.10
Family business	2	5.10
Not applicable	4	10.30
Others	1	2.60
Total	39	100.00

Table 9 provides that almost all the graduates (35.90%) personally appeared to the place as a walk-in applicant. This is a better way to easily meet the employer and give them an impression of oneself. Some (23.10%) were able to get the job through recommendations by others.

Table 10. Length of time before getting the first job

	Frequency	Percent
Less than a month	7	17.90
One to six months	18	46.20
Seven to 11 months	6	15.40
One year to less than two years	4	10.30
Two years to less than three years	1	2.60
Three years to less than four years	0	0.00
More than four years	2	5.10
Others	1	2.60
Less than a month	7	17.90
Total	39	100.00

As it appears in Table 10, it took one to six months for the majority (46.20%) of graduates before they were able to get hired in their first job while others in as short as less than a month's time (17.90%) and seven to 11 months (15.40%) respectively. This result only shows how nursing jobs are really in-demand in the labor market. Aside from the usual sought-after employment in health facilities such as hospitals, community health centers, and private clinics, there is a wide-range of new emerging jobs as options for nurses such as medical tourism, medical transcriptionist, home care, and entrepreneur.

Table 11. Initial gross monthly earning in the first job after college

	Frequency	Percent
Php5,000 to less than 10,000	21	53.80
Php10,000 to less than 15,000	8	20.50
Php15,000 to less than 20,000	5	12.80
Php30,000 to less 40,000	1	2.60
Not Applicable	4	10.30
Total	39	100.00

As reflected in Table 11, half (53.80%) of responses in the gross monthly salary of nurses belong to the Php5,000 to less than 10,000 range and only a very small percentage (2.60%) responded to be earning within the Php30,000 to less than 40,000 range. This amount is much lower than the salaries received by

Filipino nurses who are working abroad. The recorded salary only shows that majority of the respondents are still working locally. The plight of the nurses in fighting for an increase in salary, particularly those who are employed in private hospitals, has been an on-going issue for quite some time. For a nurse who is the breadwinner in a family, this is not enough to sustain the needs of the family. Based on informal interviews, an entry-level registered nurse particularly those working in local private institutions receives an average salary of Php8,000 – Php13,500 per month. There are still others who receive lower amounts. As compared to the salary of civilian personnel in national government and in first-class provinces which include nurses where salary starts at Php29,010.00 for SG 15 while SG 11 at Php20,179.00, the stated salary is way below.

Table 12. Length of stay in the first job

	Frequency	Percent
One to six months	6	12.80
Seven to 11 months	4	10.30
One year to less than two years	11	28.20
Two years to less than three years	7	17.90
Three years to less than four years	3	7.70
More than four years	4	10.30
Not applicable	4	10.30
Others	1	2.60
Less than a month	7	17.90
Total	39	100.00

The longest period spent by a graduate in the first job appears to be one year to less than two years (28.20%) followed by two years to less than three years (17.90%). Very few stay for more than three or four years. The period of one to three years is an ample time for nurses to develop themselves to be competent enough in preparation to work abroad. For those working in private institutions, these hospitals become their training ground to gain the years of experience required if one wishes to work abroad.

Table 13. Relatedness of the nursing program to the present job

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	33	84.60
No	6	15.40
Total	39	100.00

Since most respondents work as nurse practitioners (84.60%), they believe that the program that they pursued is very much aligned and relevant with their present jobs. According to them, the college has prepared them per their expectations, not only with the competencies but with the values that are needed in their everyday dealings with their patients.

Table 14. Number of companies/organizations joined/worked after graduation

	Frequency	Percent
One	22	56.40
Two	10	25.60
Three	4	10.30
Four	0	0.00
Five	1	2.60
More than five	2	5.10
Total	39	100.00

Table 14 presents that more than half (56.50%) of the respondents claimed that they stayed with one company after their graduation. Based on the same study, most respondents are still employed at St. Cabrini Medical Center, the base hospital of the institution where most of the clinical practice hours of the graduates during their college practicum where spent. The result only shows that the graduates find their first place of work satisfying. There are many reasons why an employee prefers to stay in a company but for the most, for as long as their performance is compensated well and their welfare is being taken care of, there is no reason to leave the job.

Table 15. Promotion to higher position

	Supervisory		Managerial	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	23.10	8	20.50
No	26	66.70	26	66.70
Not applicable	4	10.30	5	12.80
Total	39	100.00	39	100.00

Table 15 shows the trend in the promotion for supervisory and managerial positions assumes similar status. There is a slow movement in the promotion with a higher number (66.70%) form both positions. This only shows that there is a fast turnover among lower ranks as to their counterparts. This fast turnover may be in a form of leaving the job for a better employment abroad which is the common scenario among the nursing workforce.

Table 16. International training

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	33	84.60
No	6	15.40
Total	39	100.00

Table 16 cites that employers nowadays look on the quality of workers and competitiveness as an edge when finding for a job. As clearly seen in the results, most graduates (84.60%) have not experienced attending international trainings. The cost of international training may not be afforded by the graduates, especially with the low salaries that they are receiving in their current jobs. Being sent to an international training is usually possible for them only if it is sponsored by their employers.

Table 17. Assigned trainer/facilitator/speaker

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	15.40
No	33	84.60
Total	39	100.00

Table 17 presents that once again, most graduates (84.60%) have not been assigned to perform these tasks since most of them belong to rank and file positions. The small percentage (15.40%) who had assumed the task mostly come from supervisory or managerial positions as part of their responsibilities. Among the related tasks assigned were as ECG trainer and speaker in a number of hospital seminars such as palliative care.

Table 18. Awards/recognitions

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	8	20.50
No	29	74.40
Not applicable	2	5.10
Total	39	100.00

Table 18 shows that only few (20.50%) of the respondents had received awards/recognitions as compared to the majority (74.40%) who have not received any award. The award given to the recipients stems from recognition of their good service and performance in their area of work. For any employee, an award is an acknowledgement that performance matters for employers. Aiming for a recognition motivates a person to do beyond what is expected of them. Personal and professional development is important to help them improve their performance at work.

Table 19. Graduate/advanced studies

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	10.30
No	30	76.90
Not applicable	5	12.80
Total	39	100.00

As seen from the result, only a small percentage (10.30%) were able to pursue graduate/advance studies, two of whom finished Master of Arts in Nursing, one with teaching certificate, and one completed a technician certificate. For the 12.80 percent, the graduates are still completing the master's program and expect to be finished by 2021. Going back to school for graduate/advanced studies entails a lot of sacrifices although it promises a better future once finished. With the cost of education in graduate schools now, however, the salary of nurses today cannot afford the demand of rising educational costs. According to responses, pursuing further studies is a way to develop themselves professionally and an advantage for a future promotion. Forty-three percent of those who answered *no*, affirmed that they plan to enroll in graduate studies given the right opportunity.

Table 20. Future programs to pursue

Programs	Frequency	Percent
	25	64.00
CV Tech 2	1	2.60
MA-PHN	1	2.60
MAN	2	5.10
MAN /Teaching	1	2.60
MSN	3	7.70
MSN/LET	1	2.60
PhD in Nursing	4	10.20
Renal Course	1	2.60
Total	39	100.00

Table 20 presents future programs that graduates plan to pursue. The highest (10.20%) in the list is PhD in Nursing followed by Master of Arts in Nursing (20.51%). These are priority programs of graduates as this follow alignment with their degree program ensuring development of their competencies that are consistent with their job requirements.

Assessment of Learning and Program

Table 21.   Assessment of the program

Indicators	Weight
The course content is very comprehensive and relevant to the job	5.10
The program components are relevant to the job	5.08
The objectives of the program had been achieved	5.05
The objectives of the program are similar to the objectives of the workplace	4.95
The program length is sufficient to produce graduates with the required entry-level knowledge and/or skill in the field/workplace	5.08
The program description captures the types of duties a graduate can expect to perform in the work environment.	4.95
The courses are relevant to the intended career	5.28
Quality of instruction provided is sufficient	4.79
Quality of class advising services is sufficient for the requirement of the workplace	4.85
Interpersonal relationships had been developed in school	5.15
Related learning experience is enough to equip students with hands-on experiences related to the job	4.82

Table 21 presents that in their description, *courses are relevant to the intended career* (wm=5.28) they have chosen. This only means that the way the college had prepared the program prepared graduates to perform as required or even beyond the expectations of employers. This is supported by their succeeding answers *interpersonal relationships had been developed in school* (wm=5.15) and *the course content is very comprehensive and relevant to the job* (wm=5.10). Since nursing requires a good amount of interaction not only with clients/patients but with other members of the health team, it is good to note that this area has been achieved by graduates during their undergraduate program. While they agree that *program length is sufficient to produce graduates with the required entry-level knowledge and/or skill in the field/workplace* (wm=5.08), there is a need to enhance the quality of instruction (wm=4.79), the *related learning experiences* (wm=4.82), and *class advising* (wm=4.85) since these are weak areas identified by students having achieved the lowest means among the list criteria set.

Table 22. Assessment of the learning

Indicators	Mean
Developed my ability to work as a team player	5.15
Motivated me to do my best work.	5.21
Developed my time management skills.	4.90
Developed my initiative.	5.03
Sharpened my analytical skills	4.95
Developed my problem-solving skills.	4.79
Developed my creativity.	4.87
Developed my confidence to investigate new ideas	4.87
Stimulated my enthusiasm for life-long learning	5.15
Improved my skills in written communication	4.95
Developed my oral communication skills	4.90
Helped developed my ability to plan my own work	4.95
Helped me make informed judgment	4.87
Developed my computer skills	4.59

Table 22 indicates that for the graduates, being motivated to perform to the best of their ability (wm=5.21) has been so far the strongest learning they had absorbed. According to them, during their

engagement at work, nothing can stop them to give their most compassionate care to the patient no matter how tired and exhausted they are. This required them a lot of patience. Their training as students encouraged them to study hard and this they have carried on as they perform their responsibilities towards their clients and their team now that they are working already. They however feel that they still lack ability on making the right judgement (wm=4.87) and have difficulty looking for new ideas (wm=4.87) as well as being creative in their work (wm=4.87). With these findings, it only shows that their critical thinking abilities were not adequately developed which is very important in decision-making.

Usefulness of learned competencies

Table 23.   Competencies most useful in the first job

Professional Competencies	Mean
Communication skills	5.10
Problem-solving skills	4.97
Human relations skills	5.31
Critical thinking skills	5.08
Entrepreneurial skills	4.38
Leadership skills	4.97
Mathematical skills	4.38
Creativity skills	4.77
Information technology skills	4.69
Accounting skills	4.21
Decision-making skills	5.23

Table 23 presents that among the 11 competencies identified necessary for work, human relational skills (wm=5.31) achieved the highest rating. This means that development of positive interpersonal relationship must be given emphasis throughout the curriculum. The development of the right attitude towards patients, significant others, members of the health team, and even peers must receive proper attention as this is necessary in building good human relationships. Decision-making comes in second rank (wm=5.23) as the most useful competency in the first job. Nursing service always requires a good deal of analyzing situations and making decisions. In the process, nurses are often faced with difficulties that demand immediate answers. This is where decision-making comes in. If this competency is developed, nurses will not be entangled in situations that will test their wit. Having said this, this requires good communication skills (wm=5.10) and critical thinking skills (wm=5.08) which are considered by the graduates to be useful also in the first job. Therefore, the focus on developing soft skills is highly relevant for nurses.

Table 24.   Competencies most useful after the first job

Professional competencies	Mean
Communication skills	5.29
Problem-solving skills	5.42
Human relations skills	5.38
Critical thinking skills	5.17
Entrepreneurial skills	4.83
Leadership skills	5.25
Mathematical skills	4.67
Creativity skills	5.04
Information Technology skills	4.79
Accounting skills	4.67
Decision-making skills	5.38

Table 24 points out that reality shows that not all employees may feel fit in the first job they have landed, a reason why they choose to seek for another employment. Relative to this, the study also sought answer on which competencies were most useful in succeeding jobs. From the findings of the study, it appeared that soft skills such as problem-solving skills (wm=5.42), human relations and decision-making skills (wm=5.38), and communication skills (wm=5.29) are as useful as it is needed in the first job. There is no doubt that for nurses, soft skills really matter as these help them gain the confidence and trust of their clients. With the complexities in the modern workplace and with the diversity of clients, possessing soft skills, which are highly valued by employers, enhances the competitiveness of workers.

Usefulness of learned core values

Table 25.   Usefulness of the core values learned in college

Core values	Mean
God-centeredness	5.18
Leadership	5.31
Innovation	5.28
Integrity	5.13
Nationalism	5.10
Service-orientation	5.28

Table 25 reveals the usefulness of the core values learned in college. There are six core values that are important to be possessed by a Lycean graduate. Among the list, leadership (wm=5.31) appeared to be the most useful as perceived by graduates. Being a leader in nursing does not mean holding a position but rather it takes leadership to build a team working together to reach a desired goal. Being a leader encompasses a set of values and personal qualities distinct to a particular person, to be able to lead and be followed despite obstacles. The effort of the institution in instilling this value through emphasis in courses like *Theoretical Foundations in Nursing*, *Bioethics*, and *Nursing Leadership and Management* finds support in the additional course such as *Life and Works of Jose P. Laurel*.

Suggestions to enhance the competitive edge of LPU–St. Cabrini graduates

The experiences encountered by graduates in their workplace provide a very good reference to check and balance the quality of education provided by the institution. This is one way of looking in a realistic perspective what needs to be done in order to achieve the educational objectives set by the program and the college. The study provided an avenue for graduates to give their suggestions on how to improve the delivery of the program.

On top of their suggestion is to focus on the improvement in the *related learning experiences*. While theoretical knowledge provides a very strong foundation in the development of the student's competencies, it was emphasized that the related learning experiences of students need to be enhanced. Students need to be exposed to varied facilities to increase learning opportunities. More hands-on activities, actual demonstrations in their field of interest, and additional training relevant to their chosen field of specialization. Improvement of the facilities such as skills laboratories and provision of good clinical instructors to mentor and supervise students is of importance also.

Emphasis on the quality of teaching-learning process is also noted. Hiring good lecturers ensures that students are provided with a good knowledge-based support during application of their learned competencies. There should be innovations in the delivery of information and engagement in more in out-of-school events like attending conferences, workshops, and seminars; volunteer works needs to be strengthened to develop the confidence and values of students. Lastly, advanced level of teaching must be encouraged among faculty members.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of the Nursing graduates of LPU–St. Cabrini are female, single, and currently employed on a regular status as health practitioners in health facilities. Only few of them have finished their Master of Arts in Nursing Degree, with a number enrolled at present and a greater number with plans of enlisting in the future under the Master of Arts in Nursing and Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing programs.

For most of the graduates, as walk-in applicants, it took them approximately six months seeking for their first job as staff nurses with a starting monthly salary of Php5,000 to less than 10,000. For their first job, many of them stayed under the same company for a time period of one year to less than two years. Very few experienced being promoted to a supervisory or managerial position. There was a very slim opportunity for the majority to be sent to international trainings or be assigned as trainer, facilitator, or as speaker in seminars. Although a few were given service recognitions and awards, it was very limited.

The college had prepared the graduates to perform as required of an entry-level practitioner with highly developed interpersonal relationship skills. Despite the good preparation, weak areas of the program as identified by the graduates include the quality of instruction, related learning experiences, and class advising.

Graduates believe that motivation to perform efficiently and effectively has been so far the best that they have achieved in learning. Lacking the ability to make the right decision, lacking creativity, and difficulty in searching for new ideas, however, only show that they have not developed fully their critical thinking abilities.

Whether it be on the first job or succeeding jobs, soft skills such as problem-solving skills, human relations, decision-making skills, and communication skills are important to develop critical thinking ability.

Leadership as a brand value instilled among Lyceans is the most useful core value as perceived by Nursing graduates.

There should be a regular review of the program with stakeholders, particularly the curriculum, to find ways on how the quality of instruction and related learning experiences may be enhanced and strengthened.

A deeper analysis on how soft skills may be emphasized in the syllabus of courses where they may be tackled must be done to develop the critical thinking ability of students while in the school.

A study on how nationalism may be appropriately uplifted or projected in the development of a Filipino nurse may be done.

The course content of courses like leadership and management should be enhanced to help students understand the importance of lifelong learning as part of personal and professional development.

The college may develop a strategy to establish a way on how to better track graduates to involve a bigger number of graduates in activities such as a tracer study.

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