

# Tracer Study of Dentistry Graduates of one Higher Education Institution in the Philippines from 2008 to 2012

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**Abstract** – *This tracer study determines the employment status of the graduates of Doctor of Dental Medicine of Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) from 2008-2012. It assessed the relevance of the Dentistry curriculum, knowledge, skills and attitude acquired by the graduates deemed to be relevant for their employment; identify the personal and professional characteristics and job placement of Dentistry graduates and the school related factors associated with their employment. This tracer study used a descriptive research design. The study described the experiences of the graduates before and after employment. The graduates conveyed their personal observations regarding the situations they faced after graduation. The findings showed that majority of the Dentistry graduate-respondents are presently employed except for one whose primary reason is family concern and decided not to find a job. Most of the graduates had their first job as associate dentist with recommendation from the department or alumni of the college and opted to put up their own private practice after 6 months. Rewarding salaries and benefits are the main reason for staying on the job and are all enjoying a professional career in dentistry with initial gross income of 25,000 pesos and above. The following school related factors for job placement such as curriculum and instruction for the general education and professional subjects, student services and faculty instruction were found to be relevant in meeting the demands of the graduates' dental profession. And the following are the work related values gained by the graduates such a love for God, honesty and truth, professional integrity and leadership. These values were found to be very relevant in the practice of the profession.*

**Keywords** – *Dentistry graduates, Tracer Study, Employability.*

## INTRODUCTION

Employability of dentistry graduates after graduation had high probability due to the flexibility nature of this profession. Employment opportunities include engaging in private dental practice, associate or dental assistant, dental technician, private companies and enter the military service. Graduates of Dentistry can also be an academician, researcher, public health dentist, international dental health care provider as well as hospital dentist for both local and international territory. Majority of the graduates of LPU College of Dentistry in the tracer study for the year 1996-2007 were self-employed (50.36%) having their own dental clinic and a very small percentage of unemployed (1.55%) due to personal decision not to work [1].

With the emergence of ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) on Dental Practitioners in 2015, countries may recognise the

education or experience obtained, requirements met, & license or certification granted in other ASEAN Member Countries, for the purpose of licensing or certification of services suppliers, thereby opening new opportunities to dentistry graduates to practice the profession and be recognized in other Asian countries. In the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS), member countries should enhance cooperation in services amongst each other in order to improve the efficiency & competitiveness, diversity, production, capacity and supply, and distribution of services within & outside ASEAN Member Countries. Enhancement in the dental curricula using competency-based education, noted as the accepted norm in dental education [2], will greatly improve its competitiveness with other ASEAN countries. The most common criticism of today's dental curriculum is that it is excessively dense, in terms of the number of courses and clock hours. This curriculum

density is perhaps a by product of the tension between faculty who favour expanding the biomedical emphasis of the curriculum to allow dental practitioners to assume an even greater role in managing a patient's health and those who want to maintain a traditional technical focus [3]. The current changing environment emphasizes the importance of education for employability, focusing on the development of skills and work experience. Communication skills and improving own's performance were considered the most important among the seven countries surveyed on the international perspectives on employability [4].

This tracer study determined the employment status of the graduates of Doctor of Dental Medicine of Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) from 2008-2012. It also assessed the relevance of the Dentistry curricula, knowledge, skills and attitude acquired by the graduates deemed to be relevant for their employment; identify the personal and professional characteristics and job placement of Dentistry graduates and the school related factors associated with their employment. Because it is a part of the mission of Lyceum of the Philippines University through the College of Dentistry to uphold a globally competitive professionals for a more rewarding career not only locally but also internationally. The findings of the study served as a basis for the college to improve, update and enhance the curricula of the Dentistry program to make these more responsive to global competition. The usefulness of this program measured the employment opportunities granted to the graduates, their present positions and the nature and the relevance of the jobs they obtained after graduation.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study determined the employment status of LPU Dentistry graduates for the school year 2008-2012. Specifically, this study aimed to determine the job placement profile of the respondents in terms of their present employment, reasons if unemployed, employment status, nature of employment, present occupation, place of work, reason for staying on the job, length of job search, reasons for accepting the job, reasons for changing the job, means of job search, job level position and initial gross monthly earning; it also determined the relevance of the following student related factors such as curriculum and instruction, faculty and instructions, and students services; identify the skills and work related values which contributed in meeting the demands of the present job and analyzed the relevance of the curricula.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research design**

This tracer used descriptive research design. It will be used to describe the experiences of the graduates before and after employment. It will also help the graduates convey their personal observations regarding the situations they faced after graduation. Descriptive survey method is appropriate for data derived from simple observational situation, whether these are actually physically observed through the use of a questionnaire or poll techniques [5].

### **Participants of the Study**

The study used 25 graduates or 100 percent of the graduates for the school year 2008-2012 as respondents.

### **Instrument**

A standardized questionnaire was used as a main instrument. The questionnaire consists of three parts: the job placement of the respondents, relevance of school related factors to the job placement of the respondents, skills developed by LPU and work-related values. The Lyceum Research and Statistics Center provided the survey questionnaire for this study. Some parts of the instrument were modified to become more suitable to the nature of employment of the respondents.

### **Procedure**

The respondents were informed on the purpose of the study and invited to participate. The researchers administered some of the questionnaires personally, others were sent through email and social networking sites.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected were classified, tabulated and coded for analysis. Frequency count, percentage, weighted mean and rank were the statistical tool employed in interpreting the data obtained from the survey.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1. Graduates' Present Employment**

<b>Are you presently employed?</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	24	96.00
No	1	4.00

Table 1 showed that 24 out of 25 respondents (96 percent) were employed. Majority the respondents were able to work immediately after graduation because most of the respondents passed the board examination after graduation and licensed to put up their own private practice.

**Table 2. Reasons Why Not Employed**

Reason(s) why you are not yet employed	f	%
Family concern and decided not to find a job	1	100.00

Table 2 presented family concern and decided not to find a job as the primary reason of the being unemployed by the only respondent who has no private practice. And also the respondent was not yet a licensed dentist.

**Table 3. Employment Status**

Present Employment Status	f	%
Regular or Permanent	10	41.67
Contractual	6	25.00
Casual	1	4.17
Self-Employed	7	29.17

Table 3 showed the employment status of the respondents where 41.67 percent were regular or permanent employees, followed by 29.17 percent were self-employed, followed by 25 percent were contractual employees and lastly 4.17 percent were casual employees.

This implied that most of the respondents were able to be employed after they passed the board examination. The result can also be attributed to the excellent performance in the dentist licensure examination based on the results given by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC).

**Table 4. Place of Work**

Place of Work	f	%
Local	20	83.33
Abroad	4	16.67

Table 4 showed that most of the respondents with 83.33 percent were locally employed and only 16.67 percent were working abroad. This goes to show that most of the respondents were able to practice their profession and earn quite generously to decide on staying in the country.

Table 5 showed the reason for staying on the job of the respondents. The top three reasons presented on the table were most of the respondents enjoyed the career challenge of their profession with 87.5 percent

followed by the salaries and benefits with 75 percent and related to special skills. These implied that they are satisfied with the economic benefits and financial stability in their chosen profession.

**Table 5. Reasons for Staying on the Job**

Reason(s) for staying on the job	f	%
Salaries and benefits	18	75.00
Career challenge	21	87.50
Related to special skill	17	70.83
Related to course or program of study	15	62.50
Proximity to residence	10	41.67
Peer influence	1	4.17
Family influence	3	12.50

It shows that most of the respondents were enjoying and practicing their profession as well as earning a considerable income that created a positive impact to their lives. The result was in agreement with the study of Silva [6] on the factors influencing the dental graduates' location and sector of employment.

Table 6 showed the time it takes for the respondents to land their first job. The top three responses were less than a month with 45.83 percent followed by 1 to 6 months with 33.33 percent and 1 year to less than 2 years with 8.33 percent. The longest time the respondents took to find a job was 3 years and above with 4.17 percent.

**Table 6. Time It Takes to Land the First Job**

How long did it take you to land your first job?	f	%
Less than a month	11	45.83
1 to 6 months	8	33.33
7 to 11 months	1	4.17
1 year to less than 2 years	2	8.33
3 years to less than 4 years	1	4.17
4 years and above	1	4.17

The result implied that by the time the respondents graduated and passed the dentist licensure examination, they easily land a job and/ or put up their own private practice.

The result of the study was in agreement with the study of Narcelles et. al [7] were dentistry graduates were able to land a job after graduation.

**Table 7. Reasons for Accepting the Job**

What were your reasons for accepting the job?	f	%
Salaries & benefits	21	87.50
Career challenge	18	75.00
Related to special skills	15	62.50
Proximity to residence	10	41.67
Expanding my network influence	1	4.17

Table 7 showed the reasons for accepting the job of the respondents. The top three reasons were salaries and benefits with 87.5 percent followed by career challenge with 75 percent and related to special skills with 62.5 percent. The least among the choices was expanding their career network with 4.17 percent. The result generally showed that the respondents are enjoying their profession because of the high demand in the profession resulting to good salaries and benefits of the respondents. According to Charlie Ball [8], deputy director of research HECSU (2015), dentistry is one of the very few degrees that can rival medicine for the strongest employability prospects. It even acquired the top spot for the degree with a high starting salary in the United Kingdom based on the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education survey.

**Table 8. Reasons For Changing Job**

What were your reason(s) for changing job?	f	%
Salaries & benefits	9	36.00
Career challenge	8	32.00
Related to special skills	8	32.00
Proximity to residence	3	12.00

Table 8 showed the reasons for changing the job among the respondents. The top reason was salaries and benefits with 36 percent followed by career challenge and related to special skills with 32 percent and the last proximity to residence with 12 percent. Majority of the respondents opted to change job from being an associate dentist to putting up their own private practice. This may imply that having ones' own practice provides high financial gain as well as more career challenge because the respondents can be able to decide on their own course of action as well build their own especial skills.

**Table 9. Duration of Stay on the First Job**

How long did you stay in your first job?	f	%
1 to 6 months	3	12.50
7 to 11 months	3	12.50
1 year to less than 2 years	9	37.50
2 years to less than 3 years	3	12.50
3 years to less than 4 years	2	8.33
No Answer	4	16.67

Table 9 presented the duration of stay of the respondents on their first job. The two highest responses were 1 to less than 2 years with 37.5 percent followed by no answer with 16.67 percent. The least number of responses was 3 to 4 years with 8.33 percent.

This implies that majority of the respondents started their work as associate dentist to gain more experience

in the managing of their own private practice and later on study for more specialty skills. After 1 to 2 years of experience most of them put up their own private practice while the respondents with no answer may had already put up their own private practice after gaining their professional license after graduation.

**Table 10. How to Find First Job**

How did you find your first job?	f	%
Recommended by someone	20	83.33
Information from friends	1	4.17
Family business	2	8.33
Personally hired by the owner	1	4.17

Table 10 showed how the respondents landed on their first job. The top response was recommended by someone with 83.33 percent followed by family business with 8.33 and information from friends and personally hired by the owner with 4.17 percent. This may imply that the quality of graduates from the college were highly valued by the alumni of the college seeking new graduates to be hired in their present job.

This implies that majority of the alumni seeking for new associate dentist in their practice would hire new graduates from their alma mater because of quality education they acquire as well as its good reputation and the high result in the dentist licensure examination evidence by its consistent position in PRC board results.

**Table 11. Job Level Position (First Job)**

Job Level	f	%
Professional, Technical or Supervisory	15	62.50
Managerial or Executive	2	8.33
Self-employed	7	29.17

Table 11 showed the job level position of the respondents on their first job. The top answer was professional, technical or supervisory position with 62.5 percent followed by self-employed with 29.17 percent and the last was managerial or executive position with 8.33 percent.

This implies that majority of the respondents acquire a professional position in their first job because most them were licensed dentist and professionally qualified to the position to treat patients.

Table 12 showed the initial gross monthly income in the respondents' first job. The top answer was 25,000 pesos and above with 41.67 percent followed by 10,000 pesos to less than 15,000 pesos and 15,000 pesos to less than 20,000 pesos with 20.83% and the last was 5,000 pesos to less than 10,000 pesos.

**Table 12. Initial Gross Monthly Income in First Job**

	f	%
P5,000.00 to less than P10,000.00	4	16.67
P10,000.00 to less than P15,000.00	5	20.83
P15,000.00 to less than P20,000.00	5	20.83
P 25,000.00 and above	10	41.67

This goes to show that the profession has high demands and Filipinos awareness regarding oral health were gaining popularity thereby giving dentist a more rewarding career financially as well as professionally. Table 13 presented the competencies learned in college by the respondents. The top three answers were communication skills with 84 percent followed by human relations skills and problem solving skills with 64 percent and critical thinking skills with 56 percent. The least among the responses was the entrepreneurial skills with 32 percent. This finding were found to be in agreement with the result of the European Commission in the study of the employability of higher education graduates based on the employers' perspective [9].

**Table 13. Competencies learned in college that the respondents find very useful in their first job**

	f	%
Communication skills	21	84.00
Human Relations skills	16	64.00
Entrepreneurial skills	8	32.00
Information Technology skills	11	44.00
Problem-solving skills	16	64.00
Critical Thinking skills	14	56.00

The result clearly showed that communication skills, human relation skills and problem solving skills are important for the graduates to meet the demands of treating patients and managing them in the dental clinic. These important skills are frequently exercise by the clinicians during their undergrad to equip them as professionals after graduation. The result was in agreement with the tracer study for radiologic technology graduates that communication skills is a very important skills not only for finding jobs but also for managing patients [10] as well as other non-professions like computer engineering [11], [12]. The importance of customer service and good communication skills will continue to be a hallmark of companies/professions that succeed instead of fail [13].

Table 14 presents the curriculum and instruction general education of the college with the composite mean of relevant. The top answer was language (4.44) followed by natural sciences (4.28) and the last was mathematics (3.8) with the verbal interpretation of relevant.

**Table 14. School Related Factors to Job Placement on terms of Curriculum and Instruction (GE)**

General Education Subjects	WM	VI	Rank
1. Mathematics	3.80	Relevant	3
2. Languages	4.44	Relevant	1
3. Natural Sciences	4.28	Relevant	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>Relevant</b>	

This implies that the general education curriculum is relevant and responsive as support to the demands of the dental profession. The result was also in agreement with the study of Pring and Plata [14] where English was found to be of utmost importance because English proficiency is very important for job placement abroad.

**Table 15. Curriculum and Instruction (Professional)**

Professional Subjects	WM	VI	Rank
1. Fixed Partial Denture	4.68	Very Relevant	4
2. Removable Partial Denture	4.68	Very Relevant	4
3. Complete Denture	4.68	Very Relevant	4
4. Restorative Dentistry	4.68	Very Relevant	4
5. Periodontics	4.60	Very Relevant	8.5
6. Pedodontics	4.60	Very Relevant	8.5
7. Orthodontics	5.00	Very Relevant	1
8. Surgery	4.68	Very Relevant	4
9. Endodontics	4.60	Very Relevant	8.5
10. Fixed Partial Denture	4.60	Very Relevant	8.5
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.68</b>	<b>Very Relevant</b>	

Table 15 showed the curriculum and instruction in the professional subjects of the respondents is considered very relevant with the composite mean score of 4.68. The top answers was Orthodontics (5.00) followed by Fixed partial denture, Removable Partial denture, Complete denture, restorative dentistry and Surgery (4.68) and the last among the ranking were Periodontics, Pedodontics, Endodontics and Fixed partial dentures (4.60) and also a verbal interpretation of very relevant respectively.

These professional courses prepare the students in performing the functions of a professional dentist. The following concepts are utilized to develop knowledge and attitude of the students for the promotion of oral health and well-being.

The results mean that the curricular program of Doctor of Dental Medicine is very relevant and responsive to the demands of the dental profession. According to Venzon and Venzon [15], the educational

institution should have developed programs and implemented strategies for students to develop the competencies needed of a beginning practitioner.

The faculty and instruction of the department obtained a composite mean of 4.17 and verbal interpretation of relevant. The top answer of the respondents was mastery of the subject matter of the teachers (4.52) with verbal interpretation of very relevant followed by good communication skills and makes use of visual aids (4.44) with the verbal interpretation of relevant. The least among the responses were quality of instruction was relevant to the course (4.24), followed by relates subject matter to other fields (4.00) with the verbal interpretation of relevant, respectively and conducts himself in a dignified manner (3.16) with the verbal interpretation of moderately relevant.

The result implied that most of the faculty of the college of Dentistry were excellent, proficient and competent teachers. The years of teaching the same subject over the years by the faculty cultivated them to master the subject and produce good result especially in the Dentist board examination. This goes to show that the practice of the department regarding the loading of subjects were effective and have a direct relationship with the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the graduates applicable to their practice of dentistry.

**Table 16. Student Services**

Student Services	WM	VI	Rank
1. Library services	4.00	Relevant	2
2. Registrar's Office services	3.72	Relevant	4
3. College Dean's Office services	3.44	Moderately Relevant	7
4. Office of Student Affairs services	4.16	Relevant	1
5. Health services	3.60	Relevant	6
6. Counseling and Testing Center	3.20	Moderately Relevant	8
7. Physical Plant and Facilities	3.96	Relevant	3
8. Laboratories (Computer, Science, Laboratories, etc.)	3.64	Relevant	5
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>Relevant</b>	

Table 16 showed the answers of the respondents pertaining to students services with the composite mean of 3.72 and verbal interpretation of relevant. The top answers were office of the student affairs (4.16) followed by library services (4.0) and physical plant and facilities (3.96) with the verbal interpretation of

relevant, respectively. The least among the responses were College Dean's office services (3.44) and Counselling and Testing Center (3.2) with a verbal interpretation of moderately relevant.

The result implied that student services in the institution are relevant in achieving their goals to become dental professionals. These services had taught them discipline and respect for the rules and regulation of the institution as well as guidance during their stay as undergraduate students. The values they acquire through these services had moulded them to become responsible individuals worthy of being a professional.

The organization and administration of the institution obtained a composite mean of 4.03 and a verbal interpretation of relevant. Department heads are effective in guiding training and development of students to improve their performances (4.12) followed by Department heads possess positive attitude towards work, staff and students and the administration adheres to its vision-mission and institutional values (4.08) and verbal interpretation of relevant. The least among the responses were the school officers and heads include within their spheres of responsibility, all the vital activities of the institution and colleges and the administration ensures that training programs for students are adequate and well-organized (3.96) and with the verbal interpretation of relevant.

The result implied that among other things the handling of student services in the institution were relevant in moulding them as dental professionals. The promotion of activities, establishment of campus organization, the manner that the complaints are handled, the leadership training and co-curricular programs have a holistic effect to the graduates to enhance their people relation skills that is very relevant in their patient management as dental professionals.

**Table 17. Community Extension, Linkages and Research**

Community Extension, Linkages and Research	WM	VI	Rank
1. Community Extension services of the college	3.68	Relevant	3
2. Linkages with other institutions and OJT	4.12	Relevant	1
3. Development of research activities in the college	3.92	Relevant	2
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>Relevant</b>	

Table 19 presented the community extension, linkages and research of the college with the composite mean of 3.91 and verbal interpretation of relevant. The top answer was linkages with other institution and OJT

(4.12), followed by development of research activities in the college (3.92) and the last community extension services of the college (3.68) with the verbal interpretation of relevant. Research involvement in terms of their design project or thesis served as their culminating activity before graduation that also helped them understand the fundamentals of their present work [16].

The findings presented implied that community extension, linkages and research are relevant in their professional development as dentist. These activities had a holistic effect giving them the “outside of the school experiences” which are very important in the practice of dentistry.

**Table 18. Work-Related Values Gained**

Work-related Values	WM	VI	Rank
1. Love for God	4.76	Very Much	1
2. Honesty and love for truth	4.60	Very Much	3
3. Punctuality	4.36	Much	16
4. Obedience to superior	4.40	Much	14.5
5. Perseverance and hard work	4.48	Much	11.5
6. Creativity and innovativeness	4.52	Very Much	8
7. Courage	4.52	Very Much	8
8. Professional Integrity	4.60	Very Much	3
9. Love for co-workers and others	4.52	Very Much	8
10. Unity	4.56	Very Much	5
11. Leadership	4.60	Very Much	3
12. Tolerance	4.44	Much	13
13. Efficiency	4.40	Much	14.5
14. Supportiveness	4.52	Very Much	8
15. Perseverance	4.48	Much	11.5
16. Nationalism	4.52	Very Much	8
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>Very Much</b>	

Table 18 presented the work-related values gained by the respondents with composite mean of 4.52 and verbal interpretation of very much. The top answer of the respondents was Love of God (4.76) followed by honesty and love for truth, professional integrity, and leadership (4.6) and verbal interpretation of very much, respectively. These values are very important as dental professionals because this profession pertains to the values of human life which every medical professionals must have.

The least values learned were perseverance and hardwork (4.48), tolerance (4.44), efficiency and obedience to superior (4.40) and punctuality (4.36) with the interpretation of Much. This means that because of the unpredictability of the needs of the patients, the

dentist punctuality where usually compromised. And because the dentists are usually the owner of their practice, these values are not very much practiced.

### CONCLUSION

Majority of the Dentistry graduate-respondents are presently employed except for one whose primary reason is family concern and decided not to find a job. Most of the graduates had their first job as associate dentist with recommendation from the department or alumni of the college and opted to put up their own private practice after 6 months. Rewarding salaries and benefits are the main reason for staying on the job and are all enjoying a professional career in dentistry with initial gross income of 25,000 pesos and above.

The following school related factors for job placement such as curriculum and instruction for the general education and professional subjects, student services and faculty instruction were found to be relevant in meeting the demands of the graduates’ dental profession.

Work related values gained by the graduates such a love for God, honesty and truth, professional integrity and leadership were found to be very relevant in the practice of the profession.

### RECOMMENDATION

The employability of Doctor of Dental Medicine graduates from 2008-2012 is considered to be very fruitful and this study aimed to propose a program for the further enhancement of the dental curricula to be abreast with the ASEAN 2015 and be in line with vision of the institution to be a recognized institution in the Asia Pacific region in 2022.

The department of Dentistry must regularly update once a year the status of their graduates and ask for possible curriculum enhancement program they could offer to the College.

The students must learn to be motivated to work hard and persevere to finish their clinical requirements for them to be able to graduate after six years.

Faculty members teaching both general education and professional subjects must develop the students’ critical thinking in solving real life related cases and apply the Outcome Based Education (OBE) method of teaching and learning.

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