

“Career Outcomes of Master in Public Administration Graduates: A Tracer Study of Salary, Promotion, and Job Performance Recognition”

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ABSTRACT

This tracer study examined the career outcomes of Master in Public Administration (MPA) graduates from North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU), focusing on salary grade, promotion, and job performance recognition. Results revealed that most graduates were married (60.0%), female (60.0%), and aged 31–35 (40.0%), indicating a predominantly mid-career, family-oriented cohort. In terms of salary, the majority (60.0%) occupied Salary Grade (SG) 11–15, corresponding to mid-level professional roles, while a smaller proportion held higher supervisory or managerial positions (SG 16–25). Only 6.7% were in entry-level (SG 6–10) or top executive (SG 26–30) positions, reflecting both upward mobility potential and the experience required for top-tier roles. Promotion data showed career advancements across various sectors—academe, government administration, law enforcement, and healthcare—with transitions from entry-level to professional posts and from technical to managerial or executive roles. These patterns affirm the MPA’s role in meeting qualification standards for higher appointments and enhancing leadership readiness. Additionally, six graduates received awards recognizing professional excellence, operational efficiency, community facilitation, law enforcement service, education program implementation, and youth development leadership. Such recognitions underscore the program’s contribution to fostering public service values and high-performance competencies. Overall, findings align with literature linking postgraduate education to improved employability, leadership capacity, and career advancement in public administration.

Keywords: Master in Public Administration, Tracer Study, Salary Grade, Promotion, Job Performance, Career Outcomes, NEMSU graduates

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the career outcomes of Master in Public Administration (MPA) graduates from North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU), focusing on salary grade, promotion, and job performance recognition. By analyzing demographic characteristics, employment ranks, career mobility, and professional awards, the research seeks to understand how postgraduate training influences professional advancement in public service.

Scholars have long recognized that advanced degrees in public administration contribute to enhanced leadership competencies, improved promotion eligibility, and broader career opportunities in government and allied sectors (Teichler, 2007; Schomburg, 2010). The United Nations (2020) also notes the growing role of women in governance, reflecting trends in graduate program enrollment. Previous tracer studies highlight that marital status, career stage, and tenure significantly shape career progression, while educational attainment remains a key determinant of salary growth and eligibility for higher positions (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; CHED, 2017).

Despite the abundance of literature on graduate employability, few studies focus specifically on MPA graduates from regional state universities in the Philippines, Particularly the CARAGA Region. This gap limits understanding of how such programs affect career trajectories in less urbanized areas, where employment contexts and promotion pathways may differ from those in metropolitan centers.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the professional gains of NEMSU MPA graduates, particularly in terms of salary progression, promotion across diverse public sectors, and recognition for job performance. The findings can guide curriculum enhancement, institutional policy, and professional development programs, ensuring that MPA training remains responsive to the demands of public sector leadership.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research method, which involves the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to describe the characteristics of a specific population (Creswell, 2014). This design was deemed appropriate as it allowed the researcher to determine the current salary grades, promotions, and awards received by MPA graduates without manipulating the study variables, thereby providing an accurate profile of their career outcomes.

Respondents and Sampling Technique

The respondents of the study were MPA graduates from NEMSU between academic years 2019–2022. A total of 15 graduates participated in the study, identified through the registrar's records. Given the relatively small population of MPA graduates, total enumeration was employed, ensuring complete coverage and eliminating sampling bias.

Research Instrument

The researchers modified the survey questionnaire before starting data collection, ensuring it met the study's objectives and the recommendations established by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP) in the Masters in Public Administration program. The instrument, created using the CHED graduate tracer framework, was validated by five experts who evaluated its construct, face, and content validity. Before survey administration began, a pilot testing phase was carried out to assess the survey's effectiveness after validation (A. Aithal & P. Aithal, 2020). The instrument consisted of four sections: (1) demographic profile, (2) current salary grade, (3) record of promotions, and (4) awards or recognitions received.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered through online surveys, direct interviews, and email correspondence. Consent was obtained prior to participation, and confidentiality was maintained by coding responses and reporting aggregated data.

Data Analysis

Frequencies, percentages, and rankings were used to describe salary grade distributions, promotion patterns, and awards received. Descriptive interpretation was supported by relevant literature to contextualize findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the MPA Graduates

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
	Single	5	33.3%	2

Civil Status	Married	9	60.0%	1
	Solo Parent	1	6.7%	3
	Total	15	100.0%	
Sex	Male	6	40.0%	2
	Female	9	60.0%	1
	Total	15	100.0%	
Age	26-30	1	6.7%	5
	31-35	6	40.0%	1
	36-40	3	20.0%	3.5
	46-50	3	20.0%	3.5
	51-55	2	13.3%	2
	Total	15	100.0%	

On the above table shows that the majority of MPA graduates were married (60.0%), followed by single individuals (33.3%), and a smaller proportion who were solo parents (6.7%). This suggests that most graduates are already in stable family situations, which may influence career priorities, job stability, and promotion opportunities. Similar findings have been noted in other graduate tracer studies, where marital status often correlates with higher employment stability and long-term career engagement (Teichler, 2007; Schomburg, 2010).

In terms of sex distribution, female graduates outnumbered males (60.0% vs. 40.0%). This aligns with recent trends in public administration programs, where female participation is increasing, possibly due to the growing role of women in governance and leadership (United Nations, 2020).

Regarding age, the largest group of graduates falls within the 31–35 age bracket (40.0%), followed by equal proportions in the 36–40 and 46–50 age groups (20.0% each). A smaller proportion are aged 51–55 (13.3%) and 26–30 (6.7%). This indicates that most MPA graduates are in their early to mid-career stage, aligning with the program’s role in upskilling professionals for higher managerial positions. Studies have shown that mid-career professionals often pursue advanced degrees to improve promotion chances and salary grade (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

Work Experiences of the Graduates

Table 2 Salary Grade of MPA Graduates

		Frequency	Percent (%)	Rank
	SG 6-10	1	6.7%	4.5
	SG 11-15	8	60.0%	1
Current Salary Grade	SG 16-20	2	13.3%	2.5
	SG 21-25	3	13.3%	2.5

	SG 26-30	1	6.7%	4.5
	Total	15	100.0%	

Table 2 reveals that a majority of MPA graduates (60.0%) are in the Salary Grade (SG) 11–15 range, which in the Philippine government pay scale generally corresponds to mid-level professional positions such as administrative officers, planning officers, and technical staff. This indicates that most graduates are occupying roles that require specialized knowledge but may still have room for upward mobility.

A smaller proportion (13.3% each) fall into SG 16–20 and SG 21–25, representing higher-ranking supervisory and managerial positions. These positions typically involve greater responsibilities, policy-making roles, and leadership functions. The presence of graduates in these higher salary grades suggests that the MPA program has contributed to their professional advancement, as graduate education is often linked to promotion eligibility in public service (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2017).

The least represented salary grades are SG 6–10 and SG 26–30 (both 6.7%). The former may represent entry-level positions for recent graduates or those shifting careers into public administration, while the latter corresponds to top-level managerial or executive positions. The small number of graduates at the highest salary bracket may indicate that while the MPA provides career advancement opportunities, reaching executive-level roles typically requires additional years of experience, political appointment, or competitive selection (Civil Service Commission [CSC], 2023).

These findings align with prior tracer studies in the public sector, which show that postgraduate degrees positively influence salary progression, but the extent of advancement is also shaped by tenure, performance, and institutional opportunities (Schomburg, 2010; Teichler, 2007)

Promotion of MPA Graduates

Table 3

From	To	Number of Promoted (Recipient)
JO Staff	Instructor 1	1
Local Legislative Staff Officer V	Assistant Secretary	1
Senior Bookkeeper	Local Legislative Staff Officer V	1
AO V	SAO	1
Admin Aide III	Instructor 1	1
Customer Service Assistant C	PDO II	1
Planning Officer	Project Development III	1
Police Staff Sergeant	Police Master Sergeant	1
Acting Regional Director	Regional Director	1
Staff	Instructor 1	1
ADAS II	ADAS III	1
Nurse I	Nurse II	1
Administrative Assistant III	Project Development I	1

Table 3 shows that the promotion data of Master in Public Administration (MPA) graduates from NEMSU reveal a consistent trend of upward career mobility across various sectors, including academe, local government, law enforcement, administration, and public health. Several graduates transitioned from entry-level or support positions to professional or teaching roles, such as from Job Order Staff and Administrative Aide III to Instructor I, reflecting the MPA degree's role in meeting the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2017) requirements for higher education faculty appointments. Others advanced from technical to managerial or supervisory positions, such as Senior Bookkeeper to Local Legislative Staff Officer V and Administrative Officer V to Supervising Administrative Officer, showing clear progression within the administrative hierarchy. Career advancement was also notable in specialized government service roles, including Customer Service Assistant C to Project Development Officer II and Planning Officer to Project Development Officer III, which indicate an expansion of responsibilities in program planning and implementation. In law enforcement, the shift from Police Staff Sergeant to Police Master Sergeant illustrates merit-based promotion supported by advanced academic qualifications (PNP, 2022). Significant leadership appointments were also observed, such as the promotion from Acting Regional Director to Regional Director and from Local Legislative Staff Officer V to Assistant Secretary, which highlight the MPA's contribution to executive-level career readiness. Similarly, healthcare professionals, such as a Nurse I promoted to Nurse II, benefited from enhanced credentials in their specialized fields. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing that postgraduate degrees, particularly in public administration, enhance leadership competencies, expand promotion eligibility, and strengthen qualifications for senior positions (Teichler, 2007; Schomburg, 2010), consistent with Civil Service Commission (CSC, 2023) policies linking educational attainment to career advancement in government service.

Table 4 Awards Received by MPA Graduates

Awards	Number of Awardees (Recipients)
Best in Attendance Award 2020 (JO) & Best in Attendance Award 2023 (Faculty)	1
Best Economy Measure Award (AY 2020-2021; 2021-2022)	1
Best Community Facilitator	1
Best Regional Police and Protection Unit 13	1
Best division implementers award on school-based feeding program (SBFP) 2021-2022	1
Most Outstanding Youth Formation Coordinator (Region-Wide) and Nominated as Level II Outstanding Employee (Gawad Gintong Narra)	1

The awards and recognitions received by six out of fifteen MPA graduates illustrate their strong professional performance, community involvement, and leadership impact across multiple sectors. Achievements range from consistent work discipline, as seen in the Best in Attendance awards earned in both job order (2020) and faculty positions (2023), to operational efficiency through the Best Economy Measure Award for two consecutive academic years (2020–2021; 2021–2022), reflecting effective resource management—a core competency in public administration (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Other recognitions demonstrate graduates' significant contributions beyond administrative tasks, such as the Best Community Facilitator award, which underscores their ability to mobilize stakeholders and implement community-based initiatives. Sector-specific excellence was also evident, with one graduate receiving the Best Regional Police and Protection Unit 13 award, indicating outstanding service in law enforcement aligned with the Philippine National Police's performance merit system (PNP, 2022). In education, the Best Division Implementers Award for the School-Based Feeding Program (2021–2022) highlights the graduates' role in promoting student welfare through effective program execution. At the regional level, the Most Outstanding Youth Formation Coordinator and nomination for the Level II Outstanding Employee (Gawad Gintong Narra) showcase exemplary leadership, youth development advocacy, and institutional impact. These awards collectively reflect the MPA program's contribution to graduates'

development of professional excellence, leadership skills, and public service values, aligning with literature that links postgraduate education to enhanced job performance and recognition in both government and community service (Teichler, 2007; Schomburg, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The tracer study on the career outcomes of Master in Public Administration (MPA) graduates from North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU) demonstrates the program's substantial contribution to professional growth, promotion readiness, and recognition in public service. The graduates' demographic profile indicates a predominance of married individuals (60.0%), suggesting that many are in stable life situations conducive to long-term career engagement. The higher participation of women (60.0%) reflects the growing role of women in governance and leadership, consistent with global trends toward gender inclusivity in public administration (United Nations, 2020). Age distribution data reveal that most graduates are in their early to mid-career stage, underscoring the MPA program's relevance in equipping professionals with advanced competencies for managerial and leadership positions.

In terms of compensation, the majority of graduates are positioned within Salary Grades 11–15, corresponding to mid-level professional roles in government service. The presence of graduates in higher salary grades (SG 16–20 and SG 21–25) confirms the program's impact on career advancement, while representation at executive-level salary grades, though limited, suggests that such positions typically require additional tenure and competitive selection processes (CSC, 2023).

Promotion data reflect a consistent pattern of upward mobility, with graduates transitioning from entry-level or technical roles to supervisory, managerial, and even executive positions across various sectors, including academe, local governance, law enforcement, administration, and public health. These advancements align with the Civil Service Commission's and CHED's emphasis on educational attainment as a key criterion for promotion and higher-level appointments.

The study also highlights the strong professional performance of graduates, as evidenced by awards in operational efficiency, community facilitation, sectoral excellence, and leadership. These recognitions illustrate the graduates' capacity to apply MPA-acquired competencies—such as strategic planning, resource management, and stakeholder engagement—in delivering impactful public service.

Overall, the findings affirm that the NEMSU MPA program effectively enhances its graduates' employability, career progression, and public service contributions. By fostering leadership capabilities, administrative expertise, and a strong commitment to community development, the program positions its graduates to meet the evolving demands of governance. Sustained curriculum enhancement, sectoral linkages, and leadership training will further strengthen the program's role in shaping competent, ethical, and innovative public leaders.

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