

Tracer Study of Master of Science in Criminal Justice Graduates Major in Criminology (2019-2022) in Bicol College: Exploring Career Outcomes and Program Effectiveness

Maria Luisa N. Gonzales

Bicol College, Daraga, Albay Philippines, 4501

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ABSTRACT

This tracer study spanning 2019 to 2022 aimed to assess the career outcomes and effectiveness of a Criminology program. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, it gathered detailed data on graduates' employment status, job positions, career advancements, and program satisfaction. Notably, the study reported a 100% employment rate among graduates, affirming the program's effectiveness. Despite these successes, challenges post-graduation were identified. Beyond outcome assessment, the research delved into curriculum-industry alignment, pinpointing areas for enhancement. It provided insights into graduates' application of acquired skills in professional contexts. Through meticulous analysis, the study unveiled career trends, graduates' contributions to criminology, and perspectives on program strengths and weaknesses. The findings, presented through comprehensive reports and recommendations, are anticipated to guide curriculum refinement, enhance career prospects, and ensure ongoing industry alignment. This study offers valuable feedback to improve overall program quality and effectiveness, contributing to continuous advancements in the field of criminology through a curriculum enhancement to address the least mastered skills and knowledge acquired by the graduates.

Keywords: tracer study, graduate outcomes, career paths, program relevance, Master of Science in Criminal Justice, criminology education

INTRODUCTION

Tracer studies are essential for determining how well educational initiatives work and how graduates do in their careers across a range of industries. Because tracer studies can offer important insights into how to better align educational programs with industry needs and the shifting demands of the global labor market, their significance in higher education has gained acknowledgment in the global context (Osborne, 2017). In order to evaluate the career outcomes of graduates from the Master of Science in Criminal Justice program with a major in Criminology and to support ongoing efforts to improve the caliber and applicability of criminal justice education, this tracer study focuses on those who finished their studies between 2019 and 2022.

The criminal justice system is changing quickly throughout the world, and to meet the new difficulties, we need experts with advanced training and competence. In order to successfully respond to complex criminal activities, criminal justice personnel must be equipped with sophisticated knowledge and practical skills through comprehensive education and training programs, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2019). It has been acknowledged that tracer studies are useful instruments for assessing the results of these kinds of initiatives, assisting organizations in identifying their program's advantages and disadvantages and bringing it into compliance with global standards and best practices.

Chen et al. (2018) conducted research on tracer studies in higher education, which emphasizes the importance of evaluating graduates' employment outcomes from an international standpoint. The study highlights how important it is to comprehend graduates' employability, job happiness, and

Furthermore, in a rapidly globalizing world, the demand for skilled criminology professionals transcends national boundaries. Tracer studies conducted by universities and educational institutions worldwide have

demonstrated the importance of industry-relevant education and training in facilitating graduates' successful integration into the global job market (Maepa et al., 2020). Through this tracer study, it seeks to assess the regional and national employability of our graduates and gather data on their career trajectories, including employment in international organizations, transnational law enforcement agencies, and global research institutions. This will enable the college to evaluate the program's global competitiveness and identify areas for improvement to better prepare our graduates for diverse career opportunities.

Through an evaluation of graduates' career results, job satisfaction, and employability abroad, it works to ensure that the curriculum complies with international standards and that the graduates have the knowledge and abilities needed to thrive in the rapidly changing global criminal justice environment. By conducting this study, it hopes to improve the caliber and applicability of our curriculum and make sure that the graduates are equipped to handle the intricate problems that arise in the field of international criminal justice.

Criminology and criminal justice face particular opportunities and problems on a national level in our nation. The career outcomes and contributions of our graduates to the criminal justice system nationwide are revealed by a tracer study that focuses on graduates of the Master of Science in Criminal Justice program with a major in Criminology, specifically those who finished their studies between 2019 and 2022.

The criminal justice system in our nation is crucial for preserving law and order, assuring safety for everyone, and upholding the principles of justice. But the complexity of modern crime and the dynamic character of criminal activity necessitate a highly qualified and professional criminology personnel. The purpose of the tracer research is to assess how well the program curriculum has prepared graduates to handle the problems that confront our country's criminal justice system. There are several key areas of concern.

The quality and relevance of higher education programs, particularly those in criminology and criminal justice, have been actively promoted by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines. CHED has acknowledged tracer studies as useful instruments for evaluating program results and guiding curriculum development (CHED, 2016). We are in line with national initiatives and further the current endeavors to improve the caliber and applicability of criminal justice education by carrying out this tracer study.

In addition, our country has particular criminological problems, like high rates of organized crime, drug-related offenses, corruption, and criminality. The job outcomes and career pathways of graduates have been elucidated by tracer studies carried out by various colleges and institutions around the nation, which have also highlighted the sectors in which their skills and competence are most needed (Gonzales, 2018). By means of this tracer study, it hopes to add to the national discourse regarding the influence of the curriculum and collect information regarding the alumni' career paths concerning these urgent criminological concerns.

Additionally, the national context presents chances for interaction and cooperation with significant players in the criminal justice system. Through the evaluation of our graduates' professional results and achievements, we can forge closer ties with governmental bodies, law enforcement agencies, and community-based projects. We will be able to better match our program with the requirements of the country's criminal justice system thanks to the results of this tracer study, which will promote a win-win collaboration between research and application.

Insights into the contributions of our graduates within the national context of criminology and criminal justice are provided by this tracer study on the professional outcomes of Master of Science in Criminal Justice graduates from 2019 to 2022. The program wants to improve the caliber and applicability of the curriculum in accordance with the national goal for higher education by assessing alumni' job results, areas of specialty, and their influence on addressing national criminological concerns. The program's goal is to turn out highly qualified criminology experts who can actively contribute to the advancement and enhancement of the country's criminal justice system.

Objectives of the Study

This study determined the career outcomes of the MSCJ graduates and validate the effectiveness of the program from academic year 2019 to 2022.

Specifically, it aims to:

1. Determine the employment status and career outcomes of Master of Science in Criminal Justice graduates with a major in Criminology from the years 2019 to 2022.
2. Assess the level of perceived effectiveness of the program among the graduates.
3. Identify the challenges encountered by graduates after graduation.
4. Provide suggestions for curriculum enhancement to address the least mastered skills and knowledge acquired by the graduates.

Framework

This study was anchored on Human Capital Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, and Transition Theory.

An economic theory known as "Human Capital Theory" views health, education, and training as investments in people. It proposes that by enhancing the abilities, knowledge, and well-being of their workforce, individuals and society can raise their level of productivity and economic prosperity.

Gary S. Becker was a major proponent of this theory and its prominent figure. He maintained that people rationally decide which education and training to invest in according on the anticipated rewards, which include increased pay and better employment opportunities. Human Capital Theory, with its fundamental tenets, Education as an Investment: People invest in education and training to raise their earning potential. These expenditures could go toward formal education, career training, on-the-job training, and health enhancements. Returns on Investment: According to theory, throughout the course of a person's working life, these investments lead to higher incomes and increased productivity. Employers view education and training as means of improving an individual's skills and abilities. Implications for Policy: Education and workforce development strategies have been impacted by the Human Capital Theory. Governments and other organizations frequently fund education and training initiatives in an effort to increase the human capital of their citizenry. Critiques: According to critics, the theory fails to take into consideration variables that can impact a person's capacity to reap returns on their investments in human capital, such as discrimination, unequal access to education, and economic downturns.

Albert Bandura as the proponent of the Social Cognitive Career Theory, places a strong emphasis on the contribution that self-efficacy and observational learning make to career success. It can be used to evaluate how graduates view their own abilities and the impact of role models on their professional decisions and results.

Expectancy-Value Theory: Developed by John Eccles and Allan Wigfield, this theory examines how people make decisions depending on their perceived value of the outcomes and their expectations of success. It can be used to determine whether or not alumni think the program is meaningful.

Malcolm Knowles is the proponent of the adult learning theory, or andragogy. Knowles' theory highlights that adult learners are motivated when they perceive the connection between what they are learning and their everyday experiences. It can be used to learn how graduates view the program's applicability to their professional lives after graduation.

Understanding the processes and difficulties people and communities face throughout major life changes or transitions is the main goal of transition theory, also known as the Transition Framework or Theory of Transition. These changes might be societal—like shifts in the economy or politics—or personal—like marriage, parenthood, or retirement. The creator of this theory, Pamela King, is well-known for her work on transition theory. One of its main points is that changes present chances for both societal and personal development in addition to disruptions. During changes, people and civilizations can grow, learn, and adapt. The idea looks at a number of variables, including as a person's sense of self, social support, and the cultural and societal environment, that affect how transitions are experienced and turn out. It emphasizes how crucial support networks like as family, friends, and communities in assisting people in effectively navigating life transitions. The notion has been used to better understand and help people going through transitions in a variety of sectors,

including psychology, education, and healthcare.

From this theory, an ADAPTIVE CURRICULUM THEORY will follow. MSCJ graduates with a focus on criminology can anticipate the following benefits from applying adaptive curriculum theory: Higher Engagement: Graduates who have control over the topic of their capstone projects are more engaged, which results in higher-quality research and learning outcomes. Mastery of Skills: Adaptive curricula guarantee that graduates fill up particular skill gaps, giving them a more comprehensive skill set for their desired career routes. Better Research: Graduate students' projects are more likely to be in line with criminology's current issues and trends, making a significant contribution to the field. Enhanced Career Readiness: Upon completion of the program, graduates receive a degree as well as a portfolio of work that is closely related to their professional objectives, which increases their goals, making them more competitive in the job market.

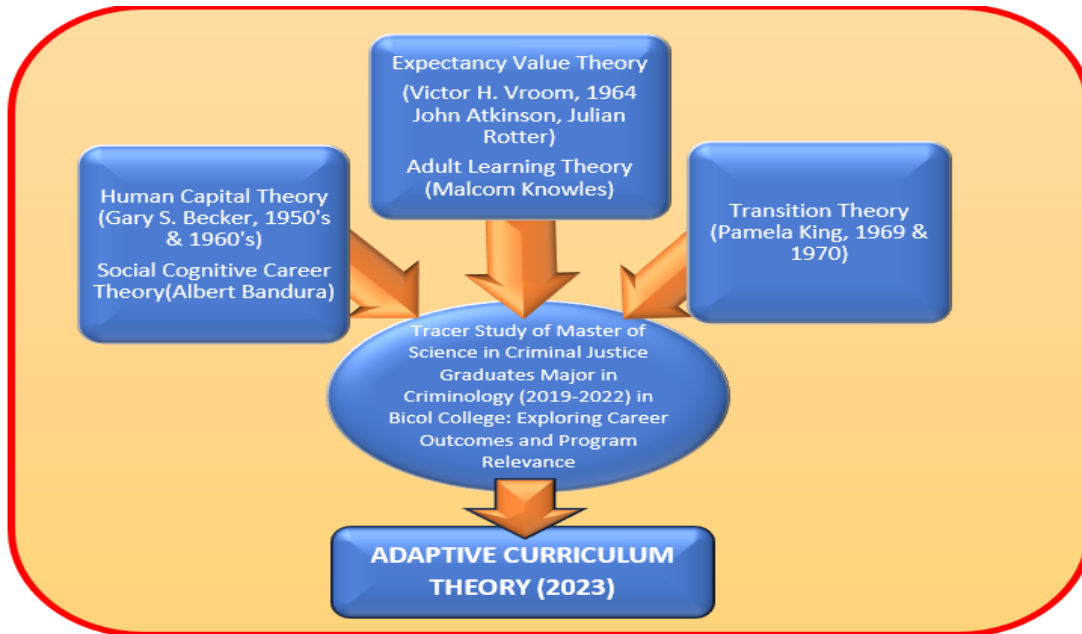


Figure 1: Theoretical Paradigm

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative and quantitative research design was employed in this study. A qualitative research design entails a thorough examination of participants' experiences, viewpoints, and situations in order to investigate and comprehend phenomena. Through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as observations, interviews, and textual analysis, it seeks to unearth rich, in-depth insights. Deepening one's understanding of social and subjective processes is a common goal of qualitative research designs. According to Creswell (2013), quantitative research design is a methodical process that gathers and examines numerical data in order to address research questions and evaluate hypotheses. It involves analyzing data and drawing conclusions using statistical techniques. Quantitative research designs are frequently employed when the goal of the study is to identify relationships between variables.

Research Instrument

Survey questionnaires were used as the research instrument for this study, taking into account its aims. In addition to providing an organized method for gathering information on the employment status and career outcomes of Master of Science in Criminal Justice graduates with a major in criminology from 2019 to 2022, the survey questionnaire was created to collect quantitative data on the degree of job satisfaction, perceived relevance of the program, obstacles faced, and recommendations for curriculum enhancements. This tool makes it possible to gather data in a standardized manner, guaranteeing uniformity in the responses and making statistical analysis easier to accomplish the goals of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

Following survey questionnaire design, it goes through a thorough review procedure that includes adviser checking and independent, approved validators validating the data. This guarantees that the tool is legitimate, dependable, and in line with the goals of the study. The feedback gathered during the review process guided the necessary adjustments or improvements. After the instrument was completed, it was given to the targeted respondents in order to collect the precise data needed for the research.

A three-day deliberation period was given to the respondents to give them enough time to finish the questionnaire. Participants can take their time answering the survey and provide precise, well-considered responses. Additionally, it fits into their schedules and offers flexibility for individuals who might want more time to finish the inquiry. The researcher collected the questionnaires from the respondents after the predetermined number of days. This retrieval lowers the possibility of data loss or incomplete responses while guaranteeing a greater response rate. It also improves the overall quality of the data by facilitating any clarifications or follow-up inquiries that may come up during the collection process.

Respondents of the Study

The graduates who were selected as respondents between 2019 and 2022 were the study's primary focus. These graduates served as the main research participants, offering insightful information and data that helped to achieve the study's goals. The purpose of the study is to obtain a complete and current understanding of the experiences and results of the targeted group by specifically choosing graduates from within this time frame.

Graduates who fit the study's criteria are identified and recruited by the researcher via a systematic sampling approach or other suitable techniques. These requirements may include actively participating in the field of study, finishing the individual programs within the allotted years, or incorporating other pertinent variables. The research findings gave a current and accurate picture of the career paths, successes, and other relevant factors associated to the targeted graduates by guaranteeing a representative sample from the chosen time frame.

The study aims to track the career progress of the graduates from 2019 to 2022 and throw light on their experiences after graduation. The information gathered from these participants proved to be an invaluable asset in evaluating and deriving conclusions concerning the efficacy and results of the educational initiatives implemented during this time frame.

Ethical considerations

Participants gave the researcher their informed consent before filling out survey questionnaires and about respondents' privacy and confidentiality, particularly with regard to sensitive career and work information.

Sampling techniques

A comprehensive list of Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MSCJ) graduates from 2019 to 2022 served as the study's population frame. The researcher traced the whereabouts of each batch of graduates from those years after compiling a list of all of them to generate this frame.

Research Locale

The research investigation was conducted in Bicol College campus. The investigator requested the essential authorizations from the college authorities in order to carry out the investigation and obtain pertinent information. The researcher specifically asked for clearance from the school authority to examine the necessary records of graduates who finished their studies between 2019 and 2022.

Data Analysis Plan

Based on the objectives of this study, the following data analysis plan or statistical tool was applied: Frequency distribution, Likert scale, and weighted mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part is the presentation of the data gathered from the questionnaire provided to the respondents:

The graduates Career Outcomes data highlights the need for more thorough study to evaluate job placements, types of employment gained, work stability, and job satisfaction of MSCJ graduates. The data does not immediately give information on graduates' career outcomes. These students chose criminal justice because they found the subject matter to be interesting and relevant to the real world, and they wanted to work in a field where they could solve problems. Upon graduation, these students overwhelmingly reported an interest in pursuing a career in federal law enforcement, according to Collica et al (2019). Understanding their career outcomes is crucial for evaluating the program's effectiveness in preparing graduates for the workforce.

The information showed a high graduation employment rate, a diverse work pool, and long-term employment in the area. This is encouraging since it shows that the graduates of the program were successfully prepared for the workforce and that there is a need for their knowledge and abilities across a range of industries.

Based on research by Ruiz et al., the study found that the majority of respondents had regular or permanent jobs. Some graduates are employed by private companies. A few began working less than a year after graduating, and the majority of their positions are related to the course work. Graduates who were unemployed explained their unemployment by citing family or health issues. They made an unsuccessful attempt to enlist in the police. Regarding employable skills, the majority possess proficiency in dismantling and reassembling weaponry as well as expertise in gathering, storing, and managing evidence. Graduates struggled to formulate inquiries relevant to their research.

Regarding perceived relevance, graduates expressed a favorable opinion of the MSCJ program and expressed high levels of satisfaction with the program's preparation and acquisition of information and abilities. The results demonstrate the program's value in providing graduates with pertinent information and abilities for the criminal justice sector as well as its role in fostering their professional development. The affirmative answers imply that the MSCJ program is accomplishing its goals of giving its alumni a worthwhile educational experience.

The difficulties faced by Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MSCJ) alumni following their graduation. Graduates seeking employment in criminal justice-related sectors face intense competition, which is indicative of a strong need for their knowledge. It is frequently difficult for individuals to land jobs that match their aspirations and capabilities because of this competition. Difficulties in the job hunt, such as waiting for appropriate positions to become available, highlight the obstacles graduates may encounter when looking for work for the first time and emphasize the importance of persistence. Furthermore, alumni note a possible training gap by perceiving a discrepancy between the information and abilities they acquired throughout their MSCJ degree and the practical requirements of certain tasks or changing business needs. Professional advancement may also be impeded, possibly because of organizational limitations or insufficient possibilities for advancement. Taking care of financial commitments after graduation,

The task of handling financial commitments after graduation can be rather difficult, particularly for individuals who have student loan debt. This highlights the significance of financial planning and support services. Another challenge for those entering the criminal justice area is building a professional network, which is essential for career progression. Attaining a work-life balance, continuing education, and adjusting to the demands of a professional workplace following an academic setting are the other complex problems graduates encounter as they start their careers in criminal justice.

To successfully address the issues faced by these graduates, curricular changes targeting the abilities that they have learned to a lower level must be prioritized.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the data, there is a very good job landscape for MSCJ graduates, with a 100% employment rate, a diverse range of work opportunities across industries including law enforcement and education, and signs of long-term job security. Graduates make a substantial contribution to the Bicol Region's criminology and criminal

justice sectors. Employers value the program's relevance and its ability to prepare graduates for their desired occupations, although there were difficulties for the graduates. In order to address these issues and optimize job opportunities for graduates, the MSCJ program ought to think about improving its support services and curriculum. This will increase the program's effectiveness in educating its alumni for fulfilling employment in the fast-paced field of criminal justice.

Translational Research

It is imperative that Bicol College persists in its pursuit of continuous improvement and benchmarking in order to evaluate the program's applicability and guarantee that its graduates are prepared for maximum growth and competitiveness. Furthermore, developing a curriculum that is current and relevant to industry demands active collaboration with stakeholders and practitioners in the field. This cooperative method creates a dynamic learning environment that is in line with practical needs. Translating the study's results into readable forms like newsletters, essays, and journal papers is also crucial. For other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) starting tracer studies for the Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MSCJ) degree, these resources are invaluable tools. Through exchanging perspectives and optimal methodologies, this study supports the wider scholarly community's endeavors to improve the caliber and benefiting the graduates and the field of criminal justice as a whole.

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