

Course Preference of College Entrants: Basis for New Program Offerings

Asia Pacific Journal of
Educational Perspectives

Vol. 8 No.1, 102-107

May 2021

ISSN: 2782-9332 (Print)

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Date Received: January 15, 2021; Date Revised: April 5, 2021

Abstract – *One of the significant decisions in life one must make is choosing a course to take in college for its effect on the person is a lifetime. Often, students are faced with a lot of options and considerations before they can finally make up their minds. Along with these factors is the prevalent concern on degrees offered by universities and colleges, which are becoming irrelevant to the demands of companies or industries. This study is anchored on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes that career development has several interrelated aspects. The study focused on 486 college entrants which was randomly selected to identify the course preference as basis for new course offering of the different departments of the College. This undertaking utilized a descriptive research design, which identified the profile of the respondents' gender, school type, and track/strand. Further, factors affecting course preferences were determined, and later named the top three preferred courses of the respondents. Results revealed that Career Opportunities, Personal Interest and Passion and Skill are the leading factors that affect their career choice. Data further showed that BS Psychology, BS Preschool Education, BS Computer Engineering, and BS Hospitality Management are among the top course choices. These results reflect that respondents are fully aware of the in-demand courses, thus opt for those courses as it opens a lot of career opportunities for them after college. Emphasis on possible career opportunities, significance of personal interest, passion and skill in the career programs given to students during career orientation and advocacy campaigns are highly recommended.*

Keywords – *Career opportunities, In-demand courses, Industry-academe partnership, Senior high school, Career Programs*

INTRODUCTION

One of the significant decisions in life one must make is choosing a course to take in college for its effect on the person is a lifetime. Often, students are faced with a lot of options and considerations before they can finally

make up their minds. Dayao and Almario (2018), in their study, forwarded that further research on the reasons why students choose a course, or a school may be considered to help graduating students in selecting a course. Course and school selection decision will most likely define their future success. Parent's preferences, financial and intellectual capacity, employability, and program offerings in school within the locale, among others, are just some of these considerations. [1] Students must be provided with all pertinent information to be able to steer them in this crucial decision. Mtemeri (2017) claimed that family members, both nucleus and extended, influenced students' choice of careers. Also, the geographical location of schools was cited as quite influential in the options of jobs by students. The same study also revealed that peers influenced students' choices of careers through peer advice and encouragement. [2] Indeed, enough time and research must be allocated in this critical phase in one's life. Limjuco et al. (2018) showed that both the students and the parents prefer a public urban type of school over the public rural and private urban. Practicality could be their reason behind this choice since public school's tuition fee is lesser as compared to that of the private schools. [3] With the increasing cost of basic needs, one cannot avoid but be rational in choosing a school that offers low tuition fees yet quality education such as local state colleges or universities.

Along with these factors is the prevalent concern on degrees offered by universities and colleges, which are becoming irrelevant to the demands of companies or industries. Pascual [4] concluded that the availability of work after college is the first consideration of students in choosing a course in college. Further, students' career success can be best attained if proper guidance is given in selecting the right course in college, suited to students' personality, ability, and intellect. Students at present consider the marketability of their chosen course, for as soon as they graduate, they are expected to support the family. Abdullah [5], in his study, however, disclosed that managers feel that there is a mismatch of

competencies and added only a small number is well equipped. The academe, therefore, must investigate the competencies being developed in schools, more so the courses being offered if they are still responsive to the needs and demands of the workforce. Laguador and Ramos [5], in their study, revealed that employers have very high standards in choosing their prospective employees. They further added that the Higher Education Institutions must provide to their students' competencies in technical skills with relevant knowledge in research, communication skills, computer skills, and leadership skills. It is edifying really that there is a need for an enhancement in the course competencies so as it will target the 21st-century skills expected of our graduates.

This study is anchored on the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994. It aimed at explaining three interrelated aspects of career development: (a) how essential academic and career interests develop, (b) how educational and career choices are made, and (c) how academic and career success is obtained. The theory integrates a variety of concepts (e.g., interests, abilities, values, environmental factors) from earlier career development theories, utilizing Albert Bandura's general social cognitive theory as a unifying framework [7]. The SCCT recommends that the decision-making process in choosing a course in college should be well-thought of and is not an easy decision to make, especially among our learners. Gestjada et al. [8] reported that different factors that may affect career decisions, such as self-efficacy, preference of students, choice of parents, aptitude, number of schools offering the desired career track, and the availability of financial assistance or scholarship. [8] With this, a study on the factors affecting course/program preference is deemed necessary.

The purpose of this study was to identify the course preference of college entrants as baseline data for the new program/course offering of Bicol State College of Applied Sciences (BISCAST). Specifically, it aimed to determine the factors affecting the course preference of grade 12 senior high school students, specifically those who intend to enter the College. It utilized survey-questionnaire to elicit data on course preferences that will serve as an evidence-based data for the College to open new programs/courses pertinent to the community needs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aimed to determine possible new course/program offerings at the Bicol State College of Applied Sciences and Technology.

Specifically, it aimed to identify the profile of college entrants for A/Y 2019-2020, along gender, Track / Strand and school type; determine the factors affecting the course preferences of the college entrants; identify the top three preferred courses by the respondents for each department of BISCAST; and suggest new programs/courses that may be offered by the College.

METHODS

This undertaking utilized a descriptive research design, which identified the profile of the respondents' gender, school type, and track/strand. Further, factors affecting course preferences were determined, and later named the top three preferred courses of the respondents. The data gathered may be a strong basis for new programs/courses that may be offered by each department of the College as a response to the identified need. The statistical treatments used were frequency distribution, percentage, and ranking to profile the SHS students in terms of gender, school type, track/strand, factors affecting course preferences, and their preferred courses. The sampling technique was through random sampling, in which the respondents were randomly selected among the entrance exam takers of the College. The researchers distributed the survey-questionnaire to select college entrants to determine their preferred course in college along with other relevant information such as gender, school type, track/strand, factors affecting course preferences. Afterward, collation, analysis, and interpretation of data was made.

The study focused on select college entrants who intend to pursue college. The 486 respondents were identified through random sampling, considering respondents' school type and track/strand. Only Grade 12 students enrolled for AY 2019 – 2020 and who will graduate by the end of the school year were considered as a respondent. It specifically involved graduating SHS, who intend to enroll in BISCAST.

The researchers prepared a survey-questionnaire as the primary tool to gather the needed data. It reflected a short profile of the respondents, a checklist of the factors affecting course preferences, and several possible courses/programs that the college may offer. The survey-questionnaire was subjected to validity test and turned out a Cronbach Alpha of 0.74. Furthermore, permission from the concerned offices and officials were sought before the actual conduct of the study. The researchers likewise conducted short discussion of the research endeavor and explained its objectives and purposes to the identified respondents before distributing the survey-questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

The following graphs show the profile of the respondents. Figure 1 indicates that of 486 respondents, 168 or 35% are male, and 318 or 65% are female. This data reflects that there were more female respondents than male.

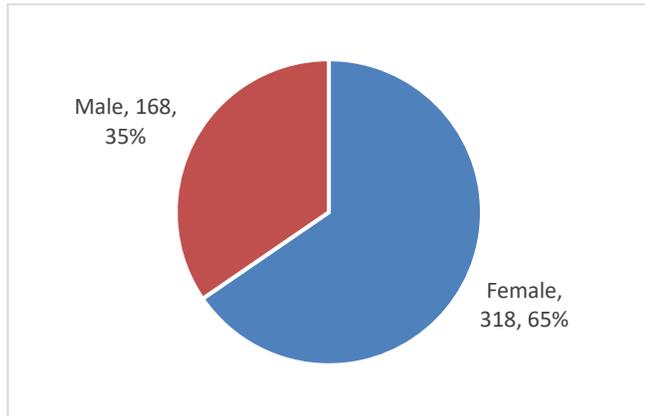


Figure 1. Gender Profile of the Respondents

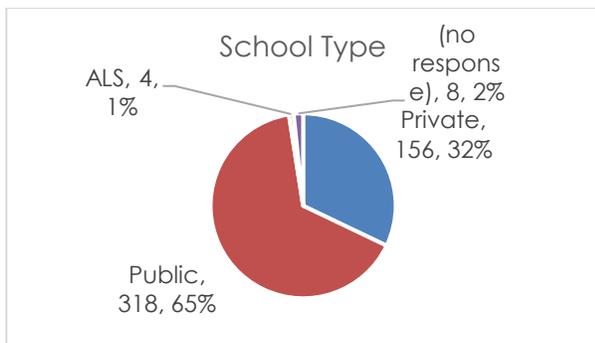


Figure 2. School Type of the Respondents

Figure 2 shows the school type of the respondents classified as Public, Private schools, and those who have completed secondary education through Alternative Learning System or ALS. Data revealed that the majority of the respondents, that is, 318 or 65% are students at public schools, 156 or 32% are from private institutions while 4 or 1% are ALS completers. Eight respondents or 2%, however, did not provide the information. This result further indicates that public school students still opt to continue college in state colleges/universities. At the same time, various percentage from private institutions manifested their interest to enter in a state college/university. This result may be due to the cost of tuition and school expenses in private institutions. Another reason may be due to the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act or

RA 10931, which mandates all state colleges/universities to offer free tuition and provide tertiary education subsidies to students.

Senior High School curriculum is divided into four tracks, namely: Academic, Technical Vocational Livelihood (TVL), Sports Track (ST), and Arts and Design Track (ADT). Figure 3 presents the respondents' SHS track where 332 or 68% of the respondents are taking the academic track, 84 or 17% are finishing the TVL track, 18 or 4% are under the ADT while 6 or 1% of the respondents are taking the ST. The 46 or 9% of the respondents did not provide information relative to their track. A large percentage of the respondents chose the Academic track. This result may be because all senior high school in the locale offers this track. A lesser rate is completing the TVL track, which seemingly due to few schools are offering the said track. Furthermore, Arts and Design Track and Sports Track are only being provided to limited identified schools in the region, thus the reason for the tiny population.

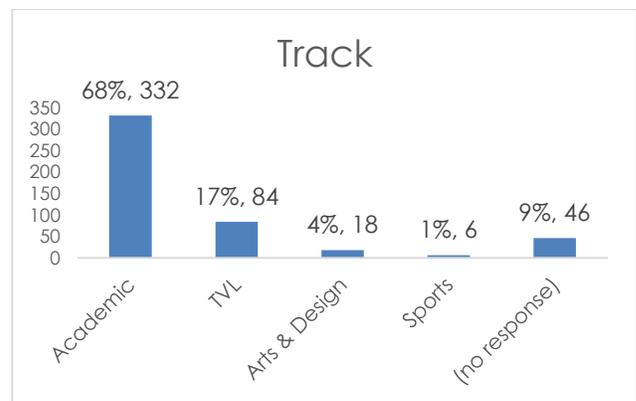


Figure 3. SHS Track of the Respondents

Besides the four major tracks in the SHS curriculum, two of these tracks have specific strands where students can choose from. The academic track has four strands being offered: Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM), General Academic Strand (GAS), Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS), and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) strand respectively. For the TVL track. Four strands are likewise identified, which are the Agri-Fishery Strand, Home Economics (HE), Information and Computer Technology (ICT), and Industrial Arts (IA). The data revealed that under the academic track, 152 or 31% of the respondents are taking GAS, 98 or 20% are finishing STEM, 44 or 9% opted ABM, while 18 or 4% are taking HUMSS. For TVL students, 26 or 5% are completing the ICT strand, 20 or 4% are finishing HE, 8

or 2% have chosen IA, and two are under the Agri-fishery strand. Some 19% or 94 respondents, however, did not provide the information relative to their strands. These results imply that the majority still choose to take GAS. It may be because this strand is open in practically all SHS in the region and has no grade requirement as long as a student passed all the learning areas, unlike the STEM and ABM strands, which have grade requirements, especially in particular learning areas. For TVL track, the ICT and Home Economics strands collected the first and second rank respectively. Under these strands are various specialization in which due to the absence of necessary facilities and equipment are not being offered in most schools. The small number of students of industrial arts and the Agri-fishery Arts strand may be attributed to that reason. It is therefore assumed that one factor that leads to a student taking a track/strand, not of his/her choice, is the unavailability of their chosen track/strand in their locale.

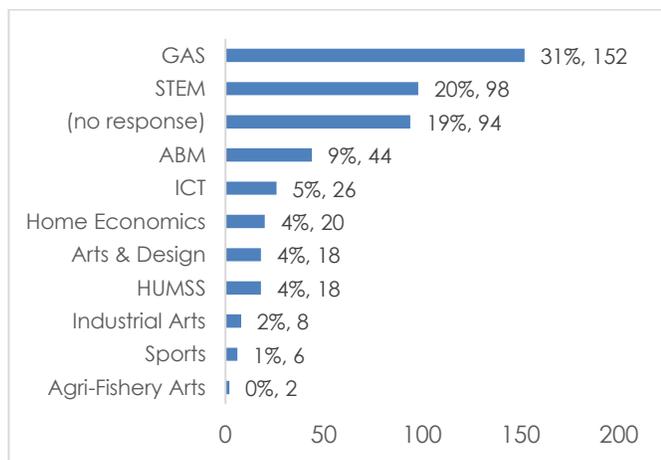


Figure 4. Respondents' specific strands

Factors Affecting Course Preference

The table below shows the identified factors affecting the course preference of the 486 respondents. Through frequency, percentage, and ranking, the researchers identified the leading factors that influence respondents' course preferences. The first factor that obtained the highest frequency is the *career opportunities* with 312 or 64%. The second is *personal interest* identified by 270 or 56% of the respondents, and the third is *passion and skill*, with 54% or 264 responses. The fourth in rank is the *academic aptitude/ intellectual capacity* with 53% or 260, and the fifth is *parent/family*, with a frequency of 258 or 53%. Other factors identified were *financial capabilities* with 200 or 41%, *economic benefits/salary* with 194 or 40%, *financial aids*

/grants/scholarships with 174 or 36%, *job stability* with 170 or 35%, *personality* with 170 or 35%, *experience* with 166 or 34%, *employability* with 162 or 33%, *location* with 156 or 32%, *values* with 144 or 30%, and *peer influence* with 138 or 28% respectively.

These findings reveal that students nowadays really take into consideration career opportunities that await them after college. It is remarkable that despite prejudices given among the young generation, the majority still prioritizes career opportunities in choosing their college course. This result may be attributed to their intention of finding a job after college consequently support their families as soon as possible.

Table 1. Factors Affecting Respondents' Course Preference

Rank	Factors	f	% (n=486)
1	Career Opportunities	312	64%
2	Personal Interest	270	56%
3	Passion and Skill	264	54%
4	Academic Aptitude / Intellectual Capacity	260	53%
5	Parents / Family	258	53%
6	Financial Capabilities	200	41%
7	Financial Benefits / Salary	194	40%
8	Financial aids/ grants / scholarships	174	36%
9	Job Stability	170	35%
10	Personality	170	35%
11	Experience	166	34%
12	Employability	162	33%
13	Location	156	32%
14	Values	144	30%
15	Peer influence	138	28%

Preferred Course of College Entrants

The table below shows the preferred course of the college entrants, which may be considered as additional offerings by each department of the College. Findings revealed that for the College of Arts and Sciences, the BS Psychology course obtained the highest frequency, which is 154 or 32% of the respondents. The BS Accountancy ranked second with 122 or 25% of the responses, AB Psychology and BS Business Economics both acquired 58 or 12% which placed third, and BS Mathematics with a frequency of 52 or 11% ranked fourth. BS Psychology seemed to be the top choice of the respondents as the course is practical, and one can land a job quickly in many ways, for it is in demand in any industry.

Table 6. Preferred Course of College Entrants

Rank	Preferred Course	Frequency	Percentage n=486
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES			
1	Psychology (BS Psychology Major in Ergonomics, Industrial Psychology)	154	32%
2	Accountancy (BSA)	122	25%
3	Psychology (AB Psychology)	58	12%
4	Business Economics (BSBA)	58	12%
5	Mathematics (BS Mathematics)	52	11%
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION			
1	Preschool Education	138	28%
2	English	126	26%
3	Technology and Livelihood Education	66	14%
4	Mathematics	60	12%
5	Filipino	56	12%
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING			
1	Computer Engineering (BSCpE)	84	17%
2	Bachelor of Science (ENGINEERING)	62	13%
3	Chemical Engineering (BSChE)	56	12%
4	Industrial Engineering (BSIE)	42	9%
5	Civil Engineering	26	5%
6	Architecture	24	5%
COLLEGE OF TRADES AND TECHNOLOGY			
1	Hotel and Restaurant Management (BS HRM)	114	23%
2	Information Technology (BSIT)	90	19%
3	Computer Science (BSCS)	66	14%
4	Tourism Management (BSTM)	34	7%
5	Bachelor of Science (Management)	28	6%

For College of Education, the highest frequency was 138 or 28% for the BEEd in Preschool Education, followed by 126 or 26% for the BSE in English, some 66 or 14% for BSE in TLE, and 12% for both BSE in Mathematics with a frequency of 60 and BSE in Filipino with 56 respectively. Parents nowadays are recognizing the significance of early childhood education for the healthy development and nurturing the essential foundations of a child through formal preschool education. The increase in preschoolers all over the world for the past years is notable; therefore, demand for Preschool Education graduates is apparent.

For the College of Engineering, the BS in Computer Engineering ranked first with a frequency of 84 or 17%. The second choice provided by the respondents is any of the BS Engineering courses taking 13% or 62 responses. Some 56 or 12% chose BS in Chemical Engineering

which ranked third, followed by BS in Industrial Engineering from 9% or 42 respondents and the fifth is BS in Civil Engineering and Architecture which earned 5% of the responses with 26 and 24 frequency, respectively. BS in Computer Engineering has a huge demand in industry as small to medium or multi-million companies are using computers in their operations along with the need to update their technology regularly. Promising opportunities for the graduates of this course is undoubtedly apparent.

For the College of Trades and Technology, BS in Hospitality Management collected the most responses with 114 or 23%. The BS in Information Technology from 19% or 90 followed these replies. BS in Computer Science ranked third, which collected 66 or 14% of the responses while the BS Tourism Management placed fourth with 34 or 7% of the replies. The 6% or 28 respondents, however, opted for any BS in Management course. The BS Hospitality Management course is significantly in demand to fulfill the balance of the hospitality establishments and the growing tourism of the country and the world. It likewise offers easy access to working overseas, mainly the reason why most respondents consider this for a college course.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Relevance of program and course offerings of the colleges and universities, both private and public, assure that we have a continuous stream of human resources to companies and industries both locally and abroad. It likewise guarantees adequate career opportunities and employability of our graduates as soon as they finish college. Further, it eradicates unemployment or underemployment in the country. Colleges and universities, therefore, must continuously assess the applicability of the program or course offerings to ensure that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge needed in the field.

Notably, the result of this research reflects the preferred courses of the incoming college students. In the area of Arts and Sciences, the BS Psychology obtained the highest course choice, for it extends a wide range of chances both for personal and professional growth among its graduates. Because of the holistic training of Psychology graduates, it opens an array of promising employment in the future for them. In Education, Preschool Education gained the top choice among the respondents. It is noteworthy that nowadays, more and more children who are enlisted to formal preschool education gets younger and younger. This result may be attributed to several reasons such as parents' increase

awareness of the importance of quality early academic intervention both to address areas of concern or giftedness of their child.

The BS Computer Engineering for the Engineering department earned the highest frequency, which offers rich career paths in both hardware engineering and software development. This result may be ascribed to the outpouring technological advancements in different industries all over the world. Similarly, BS in Hospitality Management reflected the first choice among the enumerated courses. This finding may be credited to the fact that tourism is the highest source of revenue in most countries these days. With the influx of travelers and tourists each year, it is not surprising that there is an enormous need for hospitality graduates across the world.

It recommended to emphasize the inclusion of possible career opportunities, the significance of personal interest, and the importance of passion and skill in the modules or programs given to students during career orientation and career advocacy campaigns. Further, it must be given before a student completes junior high school before students choose their track and strand in senior high school since clearly, it significantly affects their course preference in college. It will likewise ensure the continuity and development of skills learned in high school to college.

Courses as BS Psychology, BS Preschool Education, BS Computer Engineering and BS Hospitality Management be given priority for possible additional program offerings for colleges and universities.

Other courses such as BS Accountancy, BS Chemical Engineering, BS Information Technology, and others be considered for a thorough study for future program offerings in colleges and universities.

Strengthen academe-industry partnership through regular consultation to ensure supply of appropriate skills needed by the industry and promising jobs for the graduates.

This study is confined for the use of Bicol State College of Applied Sciences and Technology and is recommended that results be considered by other SUCs or higher education institutions in Bicol and other regions.

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