

## Graduate Tracer Study: Insights for Enhancing Quality Management Systems

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### Abstract

*To establish the profile of the target university graduates, this study seeks to generate actionable insights from the alumni of the university from 2019-2021 through a Graduate Tracer Study (GTS). It assesses the relevance of curricular programs, alignment with labor market needs, and graduate satisfaction. Results reveal an overall employment rate of approximately 68%, with most graduates finding jobs within one year after graduation. A significant portion passed licensure examinations, particularly from teacher education programs. The study's insights will inform institutional planning, accreditation compliance, and policy formulation, contributing to the university's quality assurance initiatives and its goal of producing globally competitive graduates who are responsive to evolving workforce demands.*

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## Introduction

Serving as the backbone of sustainable development, higher education is indispensable for both societal advancement and personal fulfillment. It equips individuals with advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies for innovation, economic productivity, and social transformation (Altbach et al., 2009). A strong higher education system contributes to the development of a globally competitive workforce, enhances employability, and supports lifelong learning. Therefore, universities and colleges must continuously evaluate and improve the relevance and quality of their academic offerings to meet both local and global demands.

To ensure that academic programs remain responsive to the needs of graduates and the labor market, Graduate Tracer Studies (GTS) serve as a strategic tool for higher education institutions. These studies have emerged as a tool to assess the employment outcomes, relevance of curricula, applicability of skills gained and alignment of educational experiences with labor market (Teichler, 2011). As such, they enable universities and colleges to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of their curricular offerings

In the Philippine context, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mandates the regular conduct of GTS to strengthen institutional quality assurance and inform policy direction (Ramos & Flores, 2022). These studies allow institutions to gather empirical data on graduates' career trajectories, skills utilization, and job alignment with their field of study, thereby facilitating curriculum enhancement and policy formulation. Cuadra et al. (2018) emphasize that GTS can offer rich, contextual insights that help bridge the gap between educational outputs and workforce demands. As an academic institution with over a century of service since 1904, Western Mindanao State University (WMSU) bears the responsibility of ensuring that its graduates are prepared to contribute meaningfully to national development and global competitiveness.

Concurrently, despite WMSU's long history of producing graduates across various disciplines, a significant research gap exists in terms of comprehensive, standardized, and program-wide tracer studies that capture employment status, marketability, and the overall impact of academic programs. Existing graduate tracking efforts are fragmented and lack baseline indicators aligned with quality assurance metrics such as the QS



Stars Rating, which sets benchmarks for employability at 90%, scaled to at least 50% of graduates employed within 24 months (Symonds, 2023). As such, there is an urgent need for a data-driven approach to monitor the employability outcomes of WMSU alumni and assess the effectiveness of its educational programs.

Moreover, the WMSU Five-Year Development Plan (2023–2027) strategically calls for the integration of GTS into its Quality Management Systems (QMS), highlighting the need to gather empirical evidence for program review, curricular alignment, and institutional accreditation. QMS ensures consistent and effective delivery of educational programs and services by promoting data-driven decision-making, continuous quality improvement, and accountability across academic and administrative units. By adopting a QMS approach, universities can better align their curricula with industry needs, enhance teaching and learning methodologies, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

However, the absence of a unified tracer study framework and empirical baseline renders current QMS indicators inadequate and unreliable. Thus, this study addresses that gap by systematically tracing the employment outcomes of graduates from academic years (AY) 2019 – 2021. It is argued that graduates from these years have had enough time to transition into the workforce, allowing us for meaningful data. Furthermore, the educational system was heavily hit by the pandemic during these years so by studying the graduates may provide valuable insights for institutional planning and resilience moving forward.

Even more, this aims to provide essential perspectives for the enhancement of WMSU's QMS, focusing on graduate marketability, curriculum responsiveness, and policy development. This research seeks to answer the pressing question of how effectively WMSU's academic programs prepare graduates for the realities of the labor market. By analyzing employment trends, curriculum relevance, and stakeholder feedback, the study contributes to ongoing efforts toward institutional improvement, educational equity, and evidence-based policy reform.

In doing so, it aligns with the global movement toward accountability, transparency, and excellence in higher education (OECD, 2020).

Specifically, it aims to establish the profile of the Western Mindanao State University graduates from the years 2019 to 2021 with the following aims:

1. To determine the graduates' demographic profile, employment rate,



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employment profile.

2. To examine the extent to which college-acquired competencies are relevant and applicable to graduates' current job roles; and
3. To assess the alignment between the graduates' current job roles and their academic experience for continual improvement.

### Literature Review

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are mandated to prepare graduates not only with technical expertise but also with ethical values, cultural awareness, and global competencies that align with the demands of today's industries (Liu, et al., 2024). In this context, graduate tracer studies (GTS) play a vital role in evaluating whether graduates possess these competencies and how effectively their education has translated into career readiness and success. Through its implementation, HEIs systematically evaluate the outcomes of their academic programs in terms of graduate employability, career progression, and professional alignment with industry requirements. It also helps them assess how tertiary experiences impact employment outcomes, while also examining their influence on graduates' socio-political involvement and overall life satisfaction. Moreover, tracer studies serve as an accountability mechanism among HEIs to measure how effectively their curricula impart both technical and transversal competencies such as ethical conduct, cultural sensitivity, and global readiness and how these skills are applied in real-world work context (Chima et al., 2023; Cuadra et al., 2024).

Numerous studies emphasized the importance of tracer studies. They are mainly utilized to enhance degree program curricula in response to industry demands. They are also applied in accreditation processes and service improvements to support HEIs in ensuring quality education with a strong focus on curriculum development. According to Sitepu (2021), tracer studies represent the initial and primary step in enhancing study programs through capturing labor markets signal and stakeholders' inputs for curriculum development and improvement. Its results could be crucial in refining learning processes equipping learners with the necessary knowledge and skills to cope up with the demands needed in work industries (Toguero & Ulanday, 2021). Similarly, Badiru & Wahome (2016) noted that tracer studies, alongside curriculum enhancement, are effective tools for improving university education and supporting program accreditation in strengthening quality assurance as they provide feedback on graduate outcomes, helping institutions align academic offerings with industry needs. These quality



assurance processes help align educational standards with regional frameworks such as the ASEAN higher education system (Lesmini, 2021; Cuadra, 2019).

Meanwhile, as noted by Njui (2018), Dotong, et al. (2015), and Schomburg (2010), the quality of graduates is a key measure of institutional performance, evaluated through mechanisms like accreditation, audits, and evaluations. Thus, tracer studies serve as a tool for generating data that inform these quality assurance mechanisms, linking graduate outcomes directly to institutional effectiveness and accountability. To enrich the existing degree programs, the institution should focus on student mobility, credit transfers, quality assurance and research clusters as the four main priorities to harmonize with the ASEAN higher education system (Cuadra et al. 2019). At present, there is a larger pool of tertiary graduates; however, many do not have the relevant skills needed for successful integration into the labor market. These students put a strain on publicly funded institutions of higher learning and many countries with limited resources are struggling to finance the growing needs of larger student body, without compromising the quality of their educational offerings (The World Bank, 2017).

Additionally, Schomburg and Ulrich (2011) contended that HEIs adopt tracer studies for various strategic purposes such as to support program accreditation, demonstrate the relevance of academic offerings to labor market demands, and generate evidence-based insights for decision-making and institutional improvement. These studies provide valuable data that inform Quality Management Systems (QMS), enabling HEIs to evaluate performance indicators such as graduate employability, job satisfaction, and alignment between educational preparation and professional roles. In the context of quality assurance, tracer studies also offer a robust basis for periodic curriculum review, ensuring responsiveness to emerging industry trends and global competency frameworks (Reusia, 2020). When integrated into institutional QMS, tracer study findings contribute to a feedback loop that enhances teaching methodologies, student support services, and faculty development. This aligns with the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8—promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

Viriansky and Raychuk (2015) emphasized that an optimization approach to curriculum development, grounded in data from tracer studies, is vital in strengthening the quality of education and preparing graduates for the dynamic world of work. The integration of GTS findings into institutional policies also enables a shift from reactive to proactive planning, as institutions



become more agile in addressing skills mismatches and anticipating labor market needs (Badillo-Amador & Vila, 2013). Moreover, HEIs with strong Quality Management Systems leverage GTS as a benchmarking tool to assess not only internal effectiveness but also external competitiveness within national and regional educational systems (Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). This benchmarking allows institutions like Western Mindanao State University (WMSU) to refine their strategic directions and achieve harmonization with ASEAN academic standards through improved program offerings, student mobility, and academic partnerships (Cuadra et al., 2019). Dela Rosa and Galang (2021) also highlighted the importance of institutionalizing graduate tracking as a regular component of educational quality management. They recommended forming industry advisory boards to ensure the alignment of curriculum enhancements with real-time labor market requirements. By embedding tracer study mechanisms within a broader QMS framework, HEIs can cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, strengthen accreditation efforts, and produce graduates who are not only employable but also industry-ready and globally competent.

At present, the growing number of tertiary graduates has not necessarily translated to successful labor market integration, largely due to a mismatch between the skills acquired in higher education and the demands of the workforce (World Bank, 2017). This mismatch places a strain on publicly funded institutions, especially in resource-constrained countries like the Philippines, where higher education institutions (HEIs) struggle to meet the increasing needs of a growing student body without compromising the quality of education. Unemployment and underemployment remain persistent issues in the country, exacerbated by the continuous rise in population and labor force, which outpaces formal job creation (de Ocampo et al., 2012). As HEIs continue to produce graduates in various fields such as commerce, engineering, and agriculture, the slow pace of job creation has led to a widening gap between education outcomes and employment opportunities. Consequently, the collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders becomes vital in ensuring graduates are adequately equipped with the skills needed for workplace success (Drine, 2017).

GTS serves as a key research tool in evaluating the effectiveness of education and training by tracking the employment outcomes of graduates and assessing the relevance of academic programs to professional demands (Cuadra et al., 2019). These studies offer critical insights for curriculum enhancement, quality assurance, and policy formulation. While many Philippine HEIs have conducted tracer studies to support accreditation, curriculum reforms, and graduate employability strategies (Caingcoy, 2021;



Plata, 2020; Schomburg & Ulrich, 2011), there remains a noticeable gap in institution-specific evaluations that feed directly into quality management systems.

Specifically, there is no research on how graduate employment data can be systematically utilized to enhance internal quality assurance processes in WMSU. Hence, this study seeks to narrow that gap by generating actionable insights from WMSU’s graduate tracer data to inform the continuous improvement of academic programs, foster industry alignment, and strengthen the university’s quality management systems.

To guide this study, a conceptual framework is presented below to illustrate the relationship between GTS’ findings and the continuous quality improvement mechanisms within higher education institutions. It emphasizes a feedback loop wherein graduate outcomes serve as performance indicators that directly influence academic policy reforms, which are the basis for the different quality assurance mechanisms. By contextualizing the tracer study within this framework, the research aims to provide a structured approach for WMSU to integrate graduate feedback into its internal QMS for sustained institutional effectiveness and accountability.

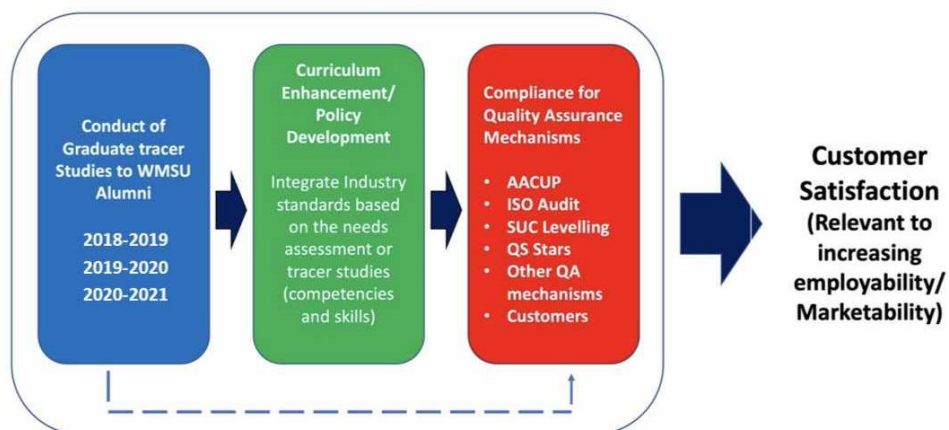


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

## Method

The current study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the employment status and job experiences of graduates. A total population of 3,270 from Batch 2020 and 3,213 from Batch 2021 were pre-identified in the study. A non-probability sampling technique – convenience



sampling – was employed to select participants. In this process, department heads and alumni coordinators chose the WMSU alumni who were conveniently available and could be contacted through online or offline means. The alumni directories by each college or department were used as the basis for contacting the potential participants. In adherence to ethical standards, participation was entirely voluntary through an affirmation of informed consent from all respondents.

To obtain the needed data, coordination with department heads, program chairs, and alumni coordinators of the different colleges and external campuses was established. These key stakeholders served as informants and facilitators in reaching the target participants. A survey questionnaire adapted from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Graduate Tracer Studies Competencies was administered both online and onsite. The instrument consisted of six major parts namely: *Part 1: Demographic Profile/General Information; Part 2: Educational Background; Part 3: Employment Data and Job Experiences; Part 4: Learning Outcomes; Part 5: Articulation of Job-Curriculum Competencies; Part 6: Curriculum Program Evaluation*. Then, responses were coded, tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages to construct a summary.

Finally, to determine the alignment between the respondents' current job roles and their undergraduate degree program, as well as to gather suggestions for improvement, participants were interviewed via electronic communication using a modified tracer study instrument based on the CHED's framework.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Graduate Profile and Employment Outcomes for AY 2019–2021**

#### **Demographic Profile**

The findings of the study reveal that the 82% of the graduates were single. Among them, significantly higher proportions were female at 85% compared to male respondents at 35%. Most of them (64%) belonged to the 26–30 age group, followed by 18% who were under the age of 25. This distribution is consistent in all academic years as well as across sex, civil status and age group. Also, most of the respondents (57%) were located in the province of Zamboanga del Sur, while about 32% lived in Zamboanga Sibugay. In terms



of residential setting, 59% of the graduates were residing in urban areas and 41% in rural areas.

Furthermore, a greater portion of the alumni participants graduated from the Teacher Education Program: 32% (BEED) and 11% (BSED). When classified by program sector, 51% have attained Science and Technology related courses and approximately 2% for the Liberal Arts Program. Overall, graduates from the Teacher Education Program comprised about 46% of the total respondents, implying a substantial representation of education-related fields among the university's recent alumni.

As for the proportion of alumni who passed the professional examination, results show that those who have passed (74.1%) is greater by 48% than those who have not taken nor passed any professional exams (25.9%). Moreover, about 3% of graduates have also taken and passed more than one type of professional exam. The type of examinations taken by graduates was mostly examination for the licensing of professions regulated by the Professional Regulations Commission (64%) while roughly 10% were for recruitment and admission into the civil service within government sector.

The study also reveals that qualifications, external influences and personal preferences were the reasons for pursuing their chosen profession. In ranking the overall response, acceptance of credentials emerged top on the list. 50% of the respondents cited being qualified for the course, 38% mentioned family influence and or potential for immediate employment (31%) reflecting external factors that have greatly influenced their course selection, 29% of them considered course availability within the institution and tied at the bottom was on peer influence and prestige associated with WMSU at 16% both.

Finally, many of the graduates have not pursued formal training or advanced studies after college; results show that 70% out of 2018 responses did not pursue and only 614 (30%) of respondents indicated that they have pursued advanced studies such as participating in formal trainings. However, a slightly higher proportion of 2019 graduates have pursued advanced studies, having 38% higher than the average of 30% for three years.

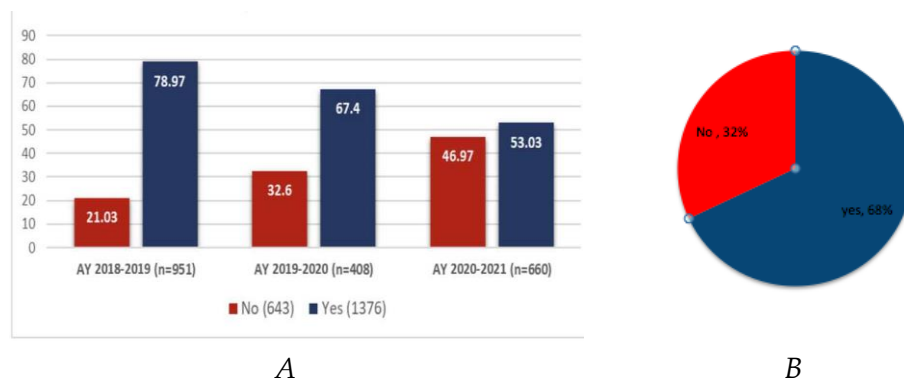
these suggest that WMSU graduates are predominantly young, single, and concentrated in education and STEM-related fields, reflecting the university's academic strengths and regional reach. A high licensure exam pass rate indicates strong academic preparation, yet the low rate of postgraduate engagement highlights the need to promote lifelong learning opportunities.

### Employment Rate

Figure 2

(A) Employability Rate of WMSU Graduates from AY 2019-2021

(B) Overall Employability Rate of WMSU Graduates



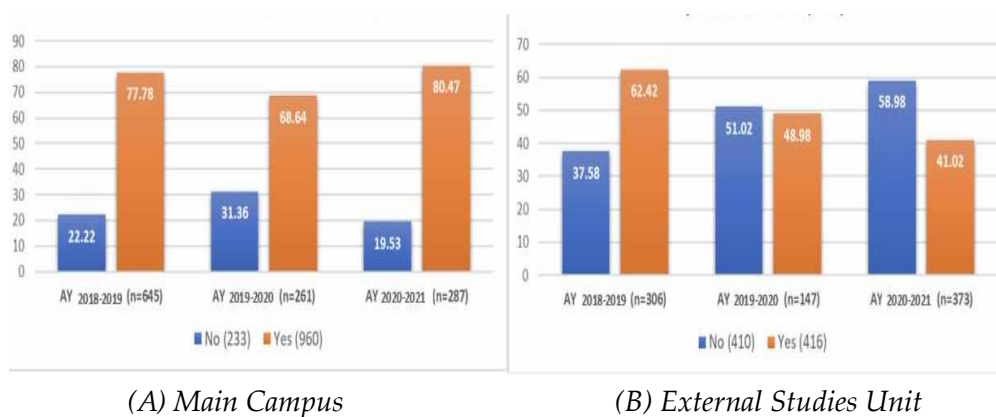
The comparative employability rates of WMSU across AY 2019 to 2021 (A), including the overall employability performance within those years (B) are illustrated above. It reveals that the employability pattern demonstrates a gradual decline in employment outcomes, particularly among the latest cohorts. This decline may reflect labor market disruptions within those years, such as those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential mismatches between graduate qualifications and job market demands can also be accounted as the culprit. This pattern is consistent with broader global findings where graduates entering the labor force during economic instability or recovery periods tend to face more significant employment challenges (Blazquez Cuesta et al., 2024). Moreover, excess labor supply, together with increased competition for limited entry-level roles, often exacerbates graduate underemployment and mismatch (Albina & Sumagaysay, 2020). Hence, based on the data, the declining employability trend at WMSU may reflect a broader structural challenge in bridging the gap between education and the labor market serving the need for ongoing quality enhancement in both academic programs and support services.



In a similar manner, the overall employability rate of WMSU graduates, although still favoring employment, indicates that a significant proportion of graduates remain unemployed. Some studies have emphasized that employability is not solely influenced by academic performance or qualifications, but also by the relevance of the curriculum to the labor market and the availability of experiential learning opportunities such as internships and industry placements (Cooper et al., 2010; Kovalev et al., 2025). To address this, Mainga et al. (2022) suggested integrating soft skills like communication, adaptability, and critical thinking into academic programs to enhance job readiness and graduate success. These findings highlight the need for ongoing curriculum enhancement and robust collaborations between the university and industry to better prepare graduates for the evolving demands of the workforce.

Figure 3

*Comparative Employability of WMSU Graduates by Campus from AY 2019–2021*



A comparative analysis of the employability of WMSU graduates from the Main Campus and the External Studies Unit (ESU) across three AY is shown above. There are distinctly contrasting patterns across AY 2019 to 2021. While the Main Campus experienced an overall positive trend in graduate employment, the ESU showed a continuous and considerable decline. The disparity in outcomes between the two campuses was most pronounced in the AY 2021, where the Main Campus achieved its highest employability rate whereas the ESU recorded its lowest.



Further analysis of the data illustrates the divergent trajectories for each campus over the observed period. The Main Campus initially saw a drop in employability from the first to the second AY, but a significant rebound catapulted it to the highest peak in the third AY. In contrast, the ESU experienced a consistent year-over-year decrease in its graduate employment rates. This sustained negative trend suggests a potential difference in the factors influencing the job market success of graduates from the university's external units compared to those from its main campus.

The disparity in employability rates may be attributed to differences in academic program offerings, access to career development resources, institutional support, and proximity to economic centers where employment opportunities are more concentrated (Sun & Chen, 2022). Since Main Campuses are often allocated the largest share of institutional budgets, they are typically better equipped with all the resources to produce highly competent employable graduates. On the contrary, ESUs frequently operate with limited funding, which may hinder their ability to offer competitive programs and robust career support. This resource imbalance reinforces the need for equity-driven policies that ensure all academic units are equally positioned to support graduate employability.

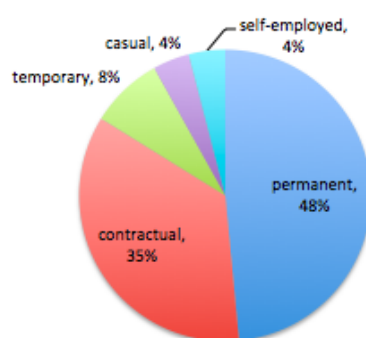
Additionally, the blame cannot rest solely on the university. Socio-economic factors including regional labor market conditions, economic slowdowns, and industry demand fluctuations, also play roles in shaping graduate employment outcomes. In places where ESUs are located—often in rural or less economically developed areas—graduates may face limited access to job markets, fewer industry linkages, and lower availability of internships or professional networks, all of which contribute to lower employability rates (Tomlinson, 2021). Moreover, individual factors such as job-seeking behavior, willingness to relocate, and adaptability to dynamic labor market demands further influence employment prospects. Therefore, addressing the disparity in employability requires not only institutional reforms but also broader economic and policy interventions aimed at expanding regional employment opportunities thus, reducing geographic inequality in access to labor market.



## Employment Profile and Job Experiences

Figure 4

*Employment Status of WMSU Employed Alumni for AY 2019-2021*



The status rate of employed WMSU alumni across the three AY is presented above. This distribution illustrates a reasonably positive employment outcome, with nearly half of the employed graduates securing long-term positions. However, the relatively high percentage of unstable positions offering limited job security and benefits indicates diverse employment pathways because of the prevailing economic trends in the country's labor market (Sumagasay, 2020).

Of the 1,680 employed respondents, 32% are working as teachers or tutors in public or private institutions. Around 10% are employed as engineers or technicians in electrical and mechanical fields. Others hold roles in administration, law enforcement, healthcare, government service, social work, call centers, finance, architecture, design, IT, and retail. Additional positions include coordinators, assistants, uniformed personnel, and various business-related jobs.

In terms of industry sectors, most graduates are employed in the education sector (28%), followed by construction (10%), health and social work (8%), public administration (6%), agriculture, forestry, and natural resources (6%), and wholesale and retail trade (6%). Smaller portions are working in law enforcement (5%), BPOs, manufacturing, and government financial institutions (each at 4%). Graduates are also represented in various other sectors including finance, ICT, transport and communications, hospitality,



private household services, non-government organizations (NGOs), and media or broadcasting.

Among these numbers, it is notable that industry engagement is closely linked to geographic employment trends (Centre for Cities, 2021). The presence of most graduates in the education sector, public administration, and health and social work may explain the high percentage (74%) of those working locally, as these sectors often offer region-based employment opportunities. In contrast, sectors like construction, BPOs, and ICT, which require specialized skills and are typically concentrated in urban or industrial hubs may account for the 19% of graduates employed in developed cities. Furthermore, the 7% working abroad are likely concentrated in globally in-demand sectors such as healthcare, engineering, and information technology. These patterns highlight the importance of aligning academic training with both local and global labor market demands to improve mobility and sectoral fit.

Ranking the reasons for job placement data reveal that 39% of the graduates found their first job through personal referrals or recommendations, followed by walk-in applications (32%), information from friends (12%) and responses to job advertisements (8%). A small percentage attributed their employment to job fairs or public agency assistance (3%) and specialized skills needed for the job (2%).

Currently, 52% of employed graduates remain in their first job after graduating from the university, while 48% have since transferred. The primary reason for accepting and staying in their first job was largely attributed to the salary and benefits as cited by 69%. More than 40% also said that keeping the first job is also influenced by the alignment of their job with their course.

Lastly, as revealed from the data, 71% confirmed alignment with their academic background, whereas 29% reported working in unrelated fields. The primary reasons for shifting included higher salary and benefits (39%), career growth opportunities (28%), and alignment with special skills (18%), proximity to residence (8%), health and safety or personal reasons (4%), and passion for the preferred work (3%).

The findings imply that enhancing job readiness programs and expanding support for high-demand sectors like ICT and healthcare can improve both



employability and long-term job retention. These information can be basis for WMSU whether to strengthen its curriculum alignment, career placement services, and industry partnerships or to revise its academic offerings to better match evolving labor market demands and graduate employment outcomes.

### Work-Relevant Competencies Gained at the University

Table 1

*Frequency of the Work-Relevant Competencies Gained at the University*

|    | <b>*Competencies</b>                      | <b><i>f</i></b> | <b>Percent of Yes</b> |
|----|---|-----------------|-----------------------|
| a) | Communication skills                      | 808             | 82.8%                 |
| b) | Human Relations skills                    | 584             | 59.8%                 |
| c) | Problem-solving skills                    | 657             | 67.3%                 |
| d) | Critical Thinking skills                  | 725             | 74.3%                 |
| e) | Information Technology Skills             | 486             | 49.8%                 |
| f) | Entrepreneurial skills                    | 186             | 19.1%                 |
| g) | Physical livelihood skills                | 2               | 0.2%                  |
| h) | Specialized skills (lab, surveying, etc.) | 2               | 0.2%                  |

Legend: *\*Multiple responses*

The list and frequency of the competencies gained from the university by the graduates that were deemed relevant in their first job are shown above. This numbers come from the 967 (68.58%) out of 1410 respondents who gave their affirmation as to whether their skills acquired during college were applicable to their initial employment.

Communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are the most frequently identified competencies gained from the university that are relevant to the workplace. Meanwhile, fewer graduates recognized entrepreneurial, physical livelihood, and specialized technical skills as relevant, indicating a potential gap in the university's ability to deliver job-specific or entrepreneurial competencies. These findings suggest the need to reinforce curricular content and practical training in entrepreneurship,



digital tools, and specialized fields to enhance graduate competitiveness across diverse sectors (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). As these skills are increasingly needed in adapting to the rapidly evolving work environments, universities must recalibrate their curricula to include more applied, skill-based learning. WMSU may then consider strengthening its industry linkage programs and implementing competency-based learning strategies to better align educational outcomes with labor market demands.

In summary, the extent of the competencies uncovered underscore the role of transferable skills in securing employment, while also revealing areas where program offerings may fall short in meeting industry-specific needs. WMSU may opt to revisit its curricular design to integrate more experiential and applied learning opportunities aligned with emerging labor market trends (De Guzman & Choi, 2013).

### Relevance of Academic Training to Current Job Roles

Figure 5  
*Graduates' feedback on Curriculum Enhancement*



Analysis of graduates' feedback revealed six key themes for enhancing the university's tertiary education curriculum. A dominant theme was the call for enhanced competence through global collaboration, technology



integration, and industry partnerships, signaling the need for the university to align its academic delivery with global industry trends and emerging digital competencies (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). Respondents also emphasized improving teaching quality through updated curricular content, better research instruction, and stronger alignment between course design and actual job roles, which mirrors findings by Caballero and Walker (2010), who stressed that employability hinges on curriculum relevance and pedagogy effectiveness. The need for modern laboratories and facilities in Engineering, Computer Science, and Sciences especially in ESUs underscores the role of experiential learning in technical disciplines (Tynjälä, 2008). Likewise, feedback highlighted the importance of specialized program offerings and robust career guidance services, reinforcing the argument by Bridgstock (2009) that structured career education and skill-specific training are vital in equipping graduates for evolving labor market demands.

These insights point to the necessity for a dynamic, competency-based, and student-centered educational model. WMSU may consider adopting a continuous curriculum review cycle that incorporates alumni feedback, labor market shifts, and technological advancements. Such reforms can help the university not only improve graduate readiness but also foster long-term professional success among its alumni.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The findings of this GTS provide a comprehensive view of the demographic characteristics, employment outcomes, competencies gained, and curriculum relevance for WMSU alumni from AY 2019–2021. A notable proportion of the graduates were from education-related programs, particularly the Teacher Education sector, with a majority being female and residing in urban areas of Zamboanga del Sur. While the overall employability rate remains relatively favorable, the data reveal a gradual decline in employment outcomes, especially among graduates of the ESUs. This decline reflects broader socio-economic disruptions brought about by the pandemic and some other factors and possible structural mismatches between academic preparation and labor market demands (Blazquez Cuesta et al., 2024; Albina & Sumagaysay, 2020).

Across all years, graduates emphasized the importance of transferable competencies such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are instrumental in securing initial employment. However,



there appears to be a shortfall in job-specific and entrepreneurial skills, indicating the need for a recalibration of curricular priorities toward more practical, applied, and industry-responsive training (De Guzman & Choi, 2013). Graduates' feedback further calls for comprehensive curriculum enhancement that prioritizes global collaboration, integration of digital tools, modernization of laboratories and facilities, and robust career guidance services. These suggestions highlight the importance of embedding both soft and technical skills across disciplines, especially in the context of increasing labor market volatility and global economic shifts (Caballero & Walker, 2010; Bridgstock, 2009).

The clear disparity in employment rates between the Main Campus and the ESUs highlights the need for equitable resource allocation and program development across all academic units. Regional economic conditions and access to job markets also play significant roles in shaping graduates' employment prospects (Tomlinson, 2021). Therefore, WMSU must adopt a more inclusive and industry-aligned academic model that takes into account geographical and economic disparities among campuses.

Considering these findings, the following are hereby recommended:

- a. Conduct another tracer study for AY 2021-2022, 2022-2023;
- b. Conduct a separate tracer study for the alumni of the Graduate School programs;
- c. WMSU Administrators and other stakeholders may investigate the decline in the employment rate of graduates particularly in ESUs.
- d. Integrate continual improvement mechanisms to improve the employment rate and quality of WMSU graduates.
- e. Include new dimensions in the research such as evaluating the effectiveness and adequacy of WMSU's curricular programs, and assessing the level of graduate satisfaction with the university's teaching quality, support services, facilities, and overall learning environment.

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