

Graduate Attributes: Hospitality Students' Self-Actualization

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Abstract

The increasing demands of knowledge economies necessitate that universities produce graduates equipped with essential skills and attributes. This study focuses on the graduate attributes of hospitality students at John B Lacson Foundation Maritime University (JBLFMU-Molo), which include effective communication, lifelong learning, analytical thinking, technical competence, and ethical responsibility. Understanding these attributes is crucial for aligning educational outcomes with employer expectations. A descriptive research design was employed to assess the extent of graduate attributes among 652 hospitality students enrolled in Bachelor of Science programs in Cruise Ship Management (BSCSM) and Tourism Management (BSTM) during the academic year 2023-2024. Data were collected through a 15-item survey administered via Google Forms, with a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.884 established from prior pilot testing. Statistical analyses, including means, standard deviations, t-tests, and one-way ANOVA, were utilized to evaluate differences based on gender, year level, and degree program. The findings revealed that the overall self-actualization of graduate attributes among hospitality students was high across all categories: Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.18), Life-Long Learners (M=4.15), Effective Communicators (M=4.14), Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.14), and Technically Competent (M=3.98). Notably, female students exhibited higher scores in Ethical Responsibility (M=4.22) compared to male students (M=4.11). Year-level analysis indicated that first-year students scored very high on Ethical Responsibility (M=4.21), while fourth-year students demonstrated significant competence across all attributes. The study concludes that hospitality students at JBLFMU-Molo possess a high level of self-actualization regarding key graduate attributes, with variations observed based on gender and year level. These results underscore the effectiveness of current educational practices in fostering essential skills among students, aligning with employer expectations for work-ready graduates in the hospitality industry. Further research is recommended to explore longitudinal changes in these attributes of a student as they progress through their academic programs.

Keywords: Attributes, Self-actualization, Hospitality students

Introduction

Rapid technological advancement is creating widespread concern about the workforces of the future, and universities are expected to produce highly skilled graduates to meet the unremitting demands of knowledge economies (Page et al., 2019). It is important to study meta-cognitive activity and development to determine if students can apply their cognitive resources in the learning and practice of specified graduate attributes (Ndethiu, 2017). Deep approaches then had a positive effect

on attribute development in students (Kember et al., 2020). According to Kalfa and Taksa in 2015, many universities have demonstrated their commitment to translating such interest into practice by elaborating lists of 'graduate attributes' to enable the development of generic skills and by encouraging their staff to adopt specific pedagogical tools for such ends.

An aspect of quality in higher education is the quality of the outcomes achieved (Ashenafi, 2019).

The graduate attributes that students of John B Lacson Foundation Maritime University (JBLFMU) should ideally demonstrate are: (1) Effective Communicators - shares information with and receives information from constituencies using oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills; (2) Life-Long Learners - creates and maintains a positive attitude to learning both for personal and professional development; (3) Analytical and Critical Thinkers - critical and complex thinker; does not just passively absorb information but analyzes, synthesizes, and applies it; Has the ability to spot existing or emerging pattern; skilled in “sensemaking”; (4) Technically Competent - demonstrates knowledge and skills required for successful accomplishment of a business, job, or task; and (5) Ethical and Socially Responsible - sets standards as to what is good or bad in conduct and decision making and obliged oneself to act for the benefit of society at large.

Tertiary institutions have, through consultation and research, developed descriptors of what qualities their new graduates will possess which allow educators to visualize what they are working towards (Baldwin et al., 2014). The group of Kember (in 2017) investigated mechanisms for promoting the development of cognitive, social, and affective attributes which could impact upon all undergraduate students. Five categories of mechanism existed: subject-independent teaching and learning activities, immersion in a rich campus environment, holding a value, subject-dependent mechanisms, and participation in an overseas exchange.

It has long been the case that higher education and the workplace share a common misunderstanding about the role of each other. Employers sometimes express their concern over the quality of graduates exiting from universities while higher education feels that employers are not fully appreciative of what qualities and skills these graduates do possess.

According to Spronken-Smith et al. in 2016, the key facets to produce a toolkit for implementing graduate attributes include strong leadership; academic developers to facilitate conversations about graduate attributes and teaching towards them; ownership of the process by the teachers; the development of a contextualized set of graduate attributes for the geography degree; curriculum mapping to promote alignment between graduate attributes, learning outcomes and assessment tasks; incorporating high-impact educational experiences and signature pedagogies to foster graduate attributes; the use of evaluative data to inform continual enhancements; and allowing at least five years for curriculum renewal to occur.

Articulation between higher education and employment in the workplace has been a focus of government initiatives in many countries. There is pressure on higher education from both government and employers to produce graduates who are employable in the sense that they have the attributes, capabilities, and dispositions to work successfully. As the pace of technological and societal change has quickened, graduate attributes have been seen as increasingly important qualities. Governments, employees, and academics have questioned whether graduates are equipped with the generic attributes which they deem important for making an effective contribution for a knowledge-based society. Universities worldwide have responded by formulating lists of graduate attributes which they intend their undergraduates to acquire by the time their degrees are completed (Kember, 2017).

Graduate attributes are developed through students' successful engagement with the learning and teaching experiences both on their taught courses and through their participation in co-curricular activities such as work placements, study abroad and volunteering. A graduate degree in business management prepares students to assume a managerial role and provide leadership skills in settings such as hotels, the food and beverage industry, travel and tourism, entertainment and sport venues, resort and spa services, and casinos. Business management is often classified as its own field but is sometimes classified as a division of business management studies (Gradschools.com, 2013). Future employers increasingly require work-ready graduates. Higher education institutions throughout the world have responded through reforming the curriculum of major strands of study to incorporate graduate attributes. Students' perceptions of their acquisition of graduate attributes were ascertained through surveys and compared with student performance on assessment tasks. The knowledgeable and problem-solving graduate attributes were successfully developed in the first-year course (Windsor et al., 2014).

A study was recently conducted exploring employers' expectations in relation to recent graduates. The study focused on the types of soft skills that employers look for from young workers, beyond professional knowledge and competence. It found that employers have similar expectations of recent graduates, regardless of their field of training, and are particularly critical of their language skills, practical experience, and motivation levels (Eurofound Foundation, 2018). Chien-Ching and Soo-Fun Chin in 2017 conducted a study to provide insights on the perceptions of engineering students from two educational paths of desired graduate attributes by employers. The findings show that communication, teamwork, and problem-solving were ranked as the top three desirable attributes by both groups of students.

There is a need to engage students meaningfully with the development of their own student identities, graduate attributes, and emergent professional identities such that they accept agency in the process rather than having their identities constructed for them through integrated systems and implementation (Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Fraser & Thomas, 2013; Haigh & Clifford, 2011; Su, 2014 in Hill et al., 2016). There is also a need to consider how generic graduate capabilities as well as the disciplinary expertise of the undergraduate students are enhanced. To avoid deferring to market forces and the consequent commodification of teaching and learning (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2013 in Hill, 2016), conscious decisions about the curriculum content and co-curricular activities, pedagogies and the nature and use of learning spaces must be done. Graduate attributes are broader and more encompassing than "employability," helping to develop academic, citizenship and career competencies. Embedding graduate attributes within curricula, however, is dependent upon academic staff viewing their role in fostering such skills and dispositions positively and delivering learning activities that are effective in the delivery of these attributes. There needs to be a move from teacher-focused to learner-focused activities (Barrie, 2007 in Hill, 2016). Evaluating the attainment of graduate attributes is not straightforward (Hughes & Barrie, 2010), and using complementary types of data, including curriculum documentation, student perceptions and longitudinal studies involving alumni and employer responses, is perhaps the optimum way to achieve this (Fraser & Thomas, 2013; Hughes & Barrie, 2010; Spronken- Smith et al., 2016).

The researcher decided to determine the extent of graduate attributes imbibed by Hospitality students at JBLFMU-Molo (AY 2023-2024).

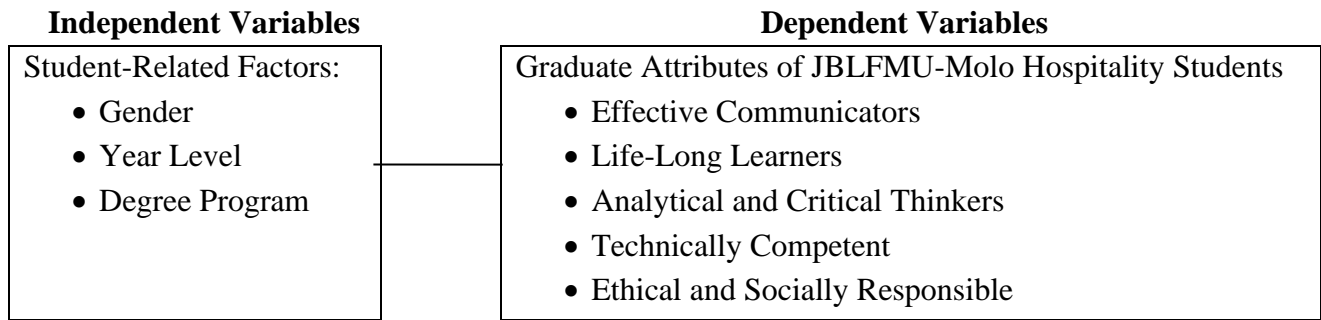


Figure 1. Interrelatedness of the graduate attributes of JBLFMU-Molo Hospitality Students and various student-related factors.

Statement of the Problem

This study conducted during the second semester of school year 2023-2024 at JBLFMU-Molo, Inc. aimed to determine the graduate attributes imbibed by hospitality students.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of the graduate attributes imbibed by hospitality students when taken as an entire group and when classified according to gender, year level, and degree program?
2. Is there a significant difference in the extent of the graduate attributes imbibed by hospitality students when classified according to gender, year level, and degree program?

Materials and Methods

This study employed descriptive research design. The researchers conducted the study at John B Lacson Foundation Maritime University (Molo), Iloilo City, Philippines. The BS Cruise Ship Management (BSCSM) and Tourism Management (BSTM) were identified as the target population. The researchers gathered data from 652 students at the College of Business and Management using Google form. The 15-item graduate attributes survey was pilot tested in 2021 and the obtained Cronbach alpha was .884 for the reliability test. Informed consent was also secured. Means and standard deviations were the statistical tools used to describe the imbibed graduate attributes. In addition, t-test and One-way ANOVA were utilized to determine significant differences in terms of gender, year level, and degree programs.

Results and Discussion

The respondents of this study were 652 hospitality students of JBLFMU-Molo. They were categorized as to their gender (male or female), year level (first year, second year, third year and fourth year), and degree program (BS Cruise Ship Management and BS Tourism Management).

The male students comprised 33% or 216 out of 652 respondents, while 67% or 436 were female students. In terms of year level, there are 31% from the first year, 23% from the second year, 19% from the third year, and 27% from the fourth year. The composition of the respondents in terms of degree program are as follows: BSCSM – 73% or 476/652, BSTM – 27% or 176/652. The data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

Categories	f	%
Entire Group	652	100.0
Gender		
Male	216	33
Female	436	67
Year Level		
First Year	201	31
Second Year	153	23
Third Year	123	19
Fourth Year	175	27
Degree Program		
BS Cruise Ship Management (BSCSM)	476	73
BS Tourism Management (BSTM)	176	27

To determine the self-actualization of graduate attributes among hospitality students of JBLFMU-Molo, Inc. (AY 2023-2024), respective mean scores and corresponding standard deviations were computed. The data on the self-actualization of graduate attributes among hospitality students of JBLFMU-Molo are presented in the succeeding tables.

The data on table 2 reveal that the self-actualization of graduate attributes among hospitality students when taken as an entire group were high: Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.18, SD=0.69); Life-long Learners (M=4.15, SD=0.67); Effective Communicators (M=4.14, SD=0.67); Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.14, SD=0.65); and Technically Competent (M=3.98, SD=0.72).

Table 2. Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when taken as an Entire Group

Graduate Attributes	Entire Group (n=652)		
	Mean	Description	SD
Ethical and Socially Responsible	4.18	High	0.69
Life-Long Learners	4.15	High	0.67
Effective Communicators	4.14	High	0.67
Analytical and Critical Thinkers	4.14	High	0.65
Technically Competent	3.98	High	0.72

Legend: Mean Description

4.20-5.00 Very High

3.41-4.20 High

2.61-3.40 Moderate

1.81-2.60 Fair

1.00-1.80 Poor

The self-actualization of graduate attributes among male hospitality students were high: Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.13, SD=0.71); Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.11, SD=0.72); Life-long Learners (M=4.09, SD=0.74); Effective Communicators (M=4.08, SD=0.74); and Technically

Competent (M=4.02, SD=0.76). Among the female respondents, it is very high on Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.22, SD=0.68). The extent is high on Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.15, SD=0.63); Life-long Learners (M=4.18, SD=0.64); Effective Communicators (M=4.17, SD=0.63); and Technically Competent (M=3.96, SD=0.69). The data is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when Grouped According to Gender

Graduate Attributes	Male (n=216)			Female (n=436)		
	Mean	Description	SD	Mean	Description	SD
Analytical and Critical Thinkers	4.13	High	0.71	4.15	High	0.63
Ethical and Socially Responsible	4.11	High	0.72	4.22	Very High	0.68
Life-Long Learners	4.09	High	0.74	4.18	High	0.64
Effective Communicators	4.08	High	0.76	4.17	High	0.63
Technically Competent	4.02	High	0.76	3.96	High	0.69

Legend: Mean	Description
4.20-5.00	Very High
3.41-4.20	High
2.61-3.40	Moderate
1.81-2.60	Fair
1.00-1.80	Poor

The data in Table 4 revealed that self-actualization of graduate attributes among the first year hospitality students were very high on Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.21, SD=0.70); and high on the following: Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.15, SD=0.63); Life-long Learners (M=4.11, SD=0.69); Effective Communicators (M=4.05, SD=0.71); and Technically Competent (M=3.95, SD=0.71). The extent is high on the various graduate attributes among the second year and the third-year students. The extent is very high on Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.27, SD=0.62); Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.24, SD=0.61); Life-long Learners (M=4.27, SD=0.62); Effective Communicators (M=4.31, SD=0.60). and high on Technically Competent (M=4.12, SD=0.66).

Table 4. Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when Grouped According to Year Level

Graduate Attributes	First Year			Second Year			Third Year			Fourth Year		
	Mean	Desc	SD	Mean	Desc	SD	Mean	Desc	SD	Mean	Desc	SD
Ethical and Socially Responsible	4.21	Very High	0.70	4.05	High	0.78	4.19	High	0.65	4.27	Very High	0.62
Analytical	4.15	High	0.63	4.03	High	0.71	4.13	High	0.63	4.24	Very High	0.61

and Critical Thinkers			3			3			3			y	1
Life-Long Learners	4.11	High	0.69	4.06	High	0.74	4.16	High	0.62	4.27	y	0.62	
Effective Communicators	4.05	High	0.71	4.04	High	0.72	4.18	High	0.61	4.31	y	0.60	
Technically Competent	3.95	High	0.71	3.85	High	0.80	3.99	High	0.67	4.12	y	0.66	

Legend: Mean		Description
4.20-5.00		Very High
3.41-4.20		High
2.61-3.40		Moderate
1.81-2.60		Fair
1.00-1.80		Poor

The data in Table 5 revealed that the self-actualization of graduate attributes among the Cruise Ship Management students were high on Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.16, SD=0.72); Effective Communicators (M=4.13, SD=0.68); Life-long Learners (M=4.13, SD=0.70); Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.13, SD=0.68); and Technically Competent (M=3.98, SD=0.74). The extent is very high among the BSTM respondents on the following: Ethical and Socially Responsible (M=4.26, SD=0.61); and Life-long Learners (M=4.21, SD=0.60). The extent is high on Effective Communicators (M=4.17, SD=0.66). Analytical and Critical Thinkers (M=4.18, SD=0.58); and Technically Competent (M=3.97, SD=0.65).

Table 5. Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when Grouped According to Degree Program

Graduate Attributes	BSCSM			BSTM		
	Mean	Description	SD	Mean	Description	SD
Ethical and Socially Responsible	4.16	High	0.72	4.26	Very High	0.61
Effective Communicators	4.13	High	0.68	4.17	High	0.66
Life-Long Learners	4.13	High	0.70	4.21	Very High	0.60
Analytical and Critical Thinkers	4.13	High	0.68	4.18	High	0.58
Technically Competent	3.98	High	0.74	3.97	High	0.65

Legend: Mean		Description
4.20-5.00		Very High
3.41-4.20		High

2.61-3.40 Moderate
 1.81-2.60 Fair
 1.00-1.80 Poor

Table 6 shows no significant difference in the extent to which the graduate attributes were self-actualized by the male and female respondents on the following: Effective Communicators $t(365.824) = -1.485, p=0.139$; Lifelong Learners $t(377.865) = -1.617, p=0.107$; Analytical and Critical Thinkers $t(386.172) = -0.302, p=0.763$; Technically Competent, $t(650) = 1.019, p = 0.309$; and Ethical and Socially Responsible, $t(650) = -1.818, p = 0.069$.

Table 6. t-test Results on Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when Grouped According to Gender

Graduate Mean	Attributes	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Effective Communicators	4.08	8.288	0.004	-	365.824	0.139
	4.17			1.485		
Life-Long Learners	4.09	4.059	0.044	-	377.865	0.107
	4.18			1.617		
Analytical and Critical Thinkers	4.13	4.370	0.037	-	386.172	0.763
	4.15			0.302		
Technically Competent	4.02	3.321	0.069	1.019	650	0.309
	3.96					
Ethical and Socially Responsible	4.11	1.506	0.220	-	650	0.069
	4.22			1.818		

Table 7 shows no significant difference in the extent to which the graduate attributes were self-actualized by the BSCSM and BSTM respondents on the following: Effective Communicators $t(650) = -0.660, p=0.509$; Lifelong Learners $t(361.547) = -1.347, p=0.179$; Analytical and Critical Thinkers $t(359.393) = -0.957, p=0.339$; Technically Competent, $t(354.804) = 0.219, p = 0.827$; and Ethical and Socially Responsible, $t(363.576) = -1.830, p = 0.068$.

Table 7. t-test Results on Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when Grouped According to Degree Program

Graduate Mean	Attributes	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Effective Communicators	4.13	2.949	0.086	-0.660	650	0.509
	4.17					
Life-Long Learners	4.13	7.559	0.006	-1.347	361.547	0.179
	4.21					
Analytical and Critical Thinkers	4.13	5.352	0.021	-0.957	359.393	0.339
	4.18					
Technically Competent	3.98	5.325	0.021	0.219	354.804	0.827
	3.97					
Ethical and Socially Responsible	4.16	6.347	0.012	-1.830	363.576	0.068
	4.26					

Table 8 presents significant differences in the extent to which the graduate attributes were imbibed by the student-respondents in terms of year level, all p's <.05. The post hoc Scheffe test revealed that the extent of self-actualization of the graduate attributes of the second year were significantly lower than those of the fourth year in the areas of Effective Communicators, Lifelong Learners, Analytical and Critical Thinkers, Technically Competent, and Ethical and Socially Responsible.

Table 8. ANOVA Results on Self-actualization of Graduate Attributes among Hospitality Students of JBLFMU-Molo when Grouped According to Year Level

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Effective Communicators	Between Groups	8.414	3	2.805	6.323	0.000
	Within Groups	287.417	648	0.444		
	Total	295.830	651			
Lifelong Learners	Between Groups	4.113	3	1.371	3.043	0.028
	Within Groups	291.914	648	0.450		
	Total	296.027	651			
Analytical and Critical Thinkers	Between Groups	3.695	3	1.232	2.912	0.034
	Within Groups	274.146	648	0.423		
	Total	277.841	651			

Technically Competent	Between Groups	6.102	3	2.034	4.017	0.008
	Within Groups	328.126	648	0.506		
	Total	334.228	651			
Ethical and Socially Responsible	Between Groups	4.186	3	1.395	2.920	0.033
	Within Groups	309.693	648	0.478		
	Total	313.879	651			

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the provided data, the researcher presents the key conclusions:

The respondents were 652 business students at JBLFMU-Molo, with 33% male and 67% female. In terms of year level, there are 31% from the first year, 23% from the second year, 19% from the third year, and 27% from the fourth year. The composition of the respondents in terms of degree program are as follows: BSCSM – 73%, and BSTM – 27%. When taken as an entire group, the business students displayed a high extent of imbibing the following graduate attributes: Effective Communicators, Life-long Learners, Analytical and Critical Thinkers, Technically Competent, and Ethical and Socially Responsible. Male students had a high extent on Analytical and Critical Thinkers, Ethical and Socially Responsible, Life-long Learners, Effective Communicators, and Technically Competent. Female students had a very high extent on Ethical and Socially Responsible, and high on the other attributes. BSCSM students had a high extent on all attributes. BSTM students had a very high extent on Ethical and Socially Responsible and Life-long Learners, and high on the others. There were significant differences between male and female students in the extent of imbibing Effective Communicators, Analytical and Critical Thinkers, and Life-long Learners. A significant difference was also noted in terms of year level – the fourth-year students self-actualization level is significantly higher than the second year. No significant differences were found between degree programs. In summary, the hospitality students at JBLFMU-Molo, regardless of degree program, displayed a high to very high extent of imbibing the key graduate attributes, with some variations between groups. The program appears to be effectively developing these competencies in its students. As the student progressed in the educational ladder, there is an increase in the self-actualization from first year to fourth year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some recommendations based on the conclusions: There is a need to address gender differences. Investigate the reasons for the significant differences between male and female students in Effective Communicators, Analytical and Critical Thinkers, and Life-long Learners. Develop targeted interventions and support to help male students improve in these areas. Ensure teaching methods and materials are inclusive and engaging for both genders. While all attributes are at a high level, identify areas that could be improved, such as Technically Competent which had the lowest mean scores across groups.

Provide additional resources, training, and hands-on learning opportunities to further strengthen these competencies.

Ensure curriculum, teaching methods, and support are consistent across degree programs to provide equitable learning experiences. Identify and address any gaps or differences in how attributes are developed in each program.

Conduct regular surveys and focus groups to gather student feedback on their learning experiences and the development of graduate attributes.

Assess student competencies at multiple points during the program to track progress and identify areas needing improvement. Use data-driven decision making to continuously enhance the curriculum and teaching practices.

By addressing gender differences, strengthening weaker areas, ensuring consistency, and regularly assessing and improving, the university can continue to produce graduates with a strong foundation in the key competencies needed for success.

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