

Career Outcomes and Progression: A Tracer Study on NEUST Bachelor of Science in Architecture Graduates

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Abstract

In alignment with the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) mandate to ensure the quality and relevance of higher education, this study conducted a comprehensive tracer survey of Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology College of Architecture graduates from 2019 to 2023. The primary aim was to assess the employment success of NEUST College of Architecture graduates from 2019-2023, providing critical insights to inform curriculum development and enhance the alignment of academic training with industry needs. By employing a descriptive survey design, the study examined the correlation between the graduates' academic preparation and their professional outcomes. Data were gathered from 288 respondents, and analysed using percentages and frequency counts to offer a clear picture of employment trends (Jones, A. & Brown, B., 2021).

The findings indicate a high level of employment success, with 84% of graduates securing positions directly related to their architectural education. These roles were predominantly within local private companies, demonstrating the effectiveness of the academic program in preparing students for the workforce. Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the broader employment landscape, the alignment between the educational program and industry requirements remained strong. The study also highlighted that a notable number of graduates were employed while completing their mandatory apprenticeships, underscoring the practical relevance of their academic training.

The study's outcomes underscore the importance of continuous curriculum evaluation to maintain the relevance of graduate competencies in a rapidly evolving job market. Additionally, to sustain and improve future participation in tracer studies, the research recommends the implementation of targeted communication strategies. These strategies should include direct outreach through alumni networks and personalised engagement to ensure a higher response rate from graduates. By integrating these recommendations, educational institutions can further strengthen the employability of their graduates and contribute to the broader goal of producing industry-ready professionals.

Keywords: Employment Success, Curriculum Development, NEUST-College of Architecture; Tracer Study

1. Introduction

In recent years, the number of individuals obtaining higher education degrees has surged. Despite this increase, many graduates still lack the necessary skills to effectively enter and succeed in the job market. This gap between educational outcomes and employment needs poses a significant challenge, particularly for publicly funded institutions in resource-constrained nations, which must balance the demands of a growing student population with the need to maintain high educational standards (The World Bank, 2017).

The dynamic economic landscape and intense competition in the job market exert considerable pressure on Philippine universities to produce graduates who are not only well-educated but also adequately prepared to contribute to national growth. Evaluating the impact of these graduates on society, institutions, and the economy is essential for understanding their role in fostering development.

Countries such as China, India, and Brazil have implemented substantial reforms in their higher education systems to improve reach and efficiency. However, progress has been uneven, with many nations prioritizing equitable access, enhanced learning, and student success across diverse contexts (Marmolejo, 2016). Abel et al. (2014) argue that new graduates often require a period of adjustment when entering the job market, highlighting the need for academic programs that align with students' skills to improve employment outcomes.

Providing high-quality education is crucial for equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to enhance their economic productivity, establish sustainable careers, and improve their overall well-being. Educational institutions strive to produce graduates who excel both domestically and internationally. Achieving this goal involves continuous evaluation of educational programs through tools like graduate tracer studies, which offer valuable insights into the employment status and success of graduates (Celis, Festijo, & Cueto, 2013).

The Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST) has made significant strides in enhancing its graduate programs and educational standards, particularly in the field of architecture. Historically, architecture in the Philippines has evolved from its early roots, where aspiring architects often pursued studies abroad. Today, the Bachelor of Science in Architecture is a rigorous five-year program that equips students with the comprehensive skills and knowledge needed for the profession, including site analysis, planning, design, and construction, per guidelines set by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (Petry, 2004).

Addressing ongoing issues of unemployment and underemployment, which are more pronounced in the Philippines compared to other Asian countries, requires higher education institutions to build strong partnerships with industry. Such collaborations ensure that curricula meet job market needs and help bridge the gap between education and employment (de Ocampo, Bagano, & Tan, 2012;

Drine, 2017). Graduate tracer studies play a crucial role in this process by providing critical data on how well educational outcomes align with employment success.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the College of Architecture at NEUST in preparing students for successful careers. It will assess whether the university's employment preparation efforts correlate with graduate satisfaction and examine the graduates' transition from academia to the workforce. By analyzing the alignment between their academic training and employment roles, whether local or international, the study will offer valuable insights for refining the curriculum and enhancing NEUST's role in producing industry-ready professionals.

2. Methodology

This section details the methods used to conduct the study, ensuring sufficient information is provided for reproducibility. Methods that have been previously published are indicated by a reference, with only relevant modifications described (Esteban et al., 2016).

2.1. Sampling Procedure

A census sampling approach was employed, targeting all graduates from the College of Architecture at NEUST between 2019 and 2023, resulting in a sample size of 288 graduates. Data collection was conducted through an online survey, supplemented by follow-up calls to improve response rates and verify data accuracy. The survey captured information on employment status, job sector, relevance of the job to the degree, and the time taken to secure employment. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, providing a clear overview of employment trends among the graduates.

2.2. Respondents

The respondents for this study consisted of 288 graduates from the College of Architecture at NEUST, who completed their studies between 2019 and 2023. All graduates were contacted via an online survey, which captured data on employment status, job sector, job relevance to their degree, and the duration between graduation and employment. Follow-up calls were conducted to verify the accuracy of the survey data and to increase response rates, as suggested by Dillman et al. (2014).

2.2.1 Research Site

The research was conducted at the College of Architecture, Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology (NEUST), located in Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, Philippines. NEUST is a state university known for its commitment to producing industry-ready graduates, particularly through its College of Architecture, which offers a rigorous five-year program. This program emphasizes practical and

technical skills in areas such as site analysis, design, and construction, all aligned with the guidelines set by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

The College's strategic location in Cabanatuan City, a rapidly urbanizing area, plays a significant role in shaping the employment outcomes of its graduates. The proximity to various architectural firms, construction companies, and urban development projects provides students with ample opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and employment upon graduation. The College's strong reputation for academic excellence and industry partnerships further enhances its graduates' employability, making it an ideal site for this tracer study (CHED, 2019).

Table 1 Frequency of Survey Responses Among Graduates by Year (2019-2023)

Frequency (e.g., Year of Survey)	Total Respondents (Sample)	Respondents Removed (Non-Responses)
2019	47	0
2020	58	0
2021	75	0
2022	41	0
2023	67	0

This table shows the employment status of graduates from the College of Architecture at NEUST from 2019 to 2023, including the total number of graduates, those employed, and those unemployed.

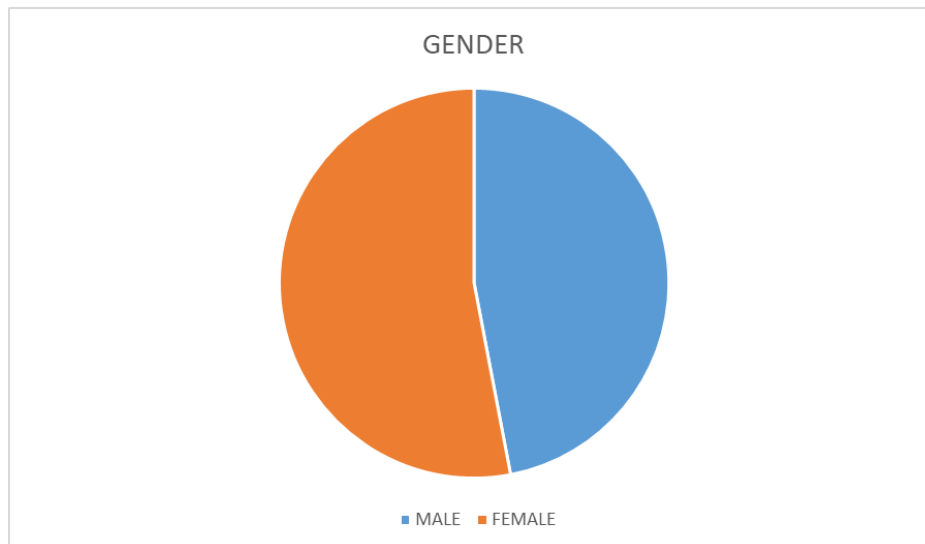


Figure 1. Sex of Respondents of NEUST Architecture Graduates from Year (2019-2023)

The pie chart above displays the gender distribution of a group totaling 288 individuals. The chart shows that 136 are male, accounting for approximately 47.2% of the total, while 152 are female, representing around 52.8%. The visual split between the blue (male) and orange (female) segments illustrates the slightly higher proportion of females in the group.

3. Results and Discussion

Employment Outcomes of NEUST Architecture Graduates

The study found that 84% of NEUST Architecture graduates secured employment within their field, demonstrating the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for the job market. Employment rates varied across the years, with the lowest at 57% in 2021, coinciding with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This suggests that while the program is robust, external factors such as economic disruptions can temporarily affect employment outcomes. The high employment rate in 2023 (94%) indicates a strong recovery and the resilience of the curriculum in meeting industry needs.

The findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of curriculum alignment with industry requirements. NEUST's strong performance suggests that its architecture program could serve as a model for other institutions aiming to improve graduate employability through industry-focused academic programs.

3.1. *Employment Outcomes of NEUST Architecture Graduates*

The employment rates of graduates varied slightly across the five years studied. As shown in **Figure 2**, the employment rate remained consistently above 80% for most years, with the lowest employment rate of 57% occurring in 2021. This year coincides with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a temporary decline in construction projects and hiring in the architecture field. In contrast, the highest employment rate was recorded in 2023 at 94%, reflecting a strong - pandemic recovery in the job market.

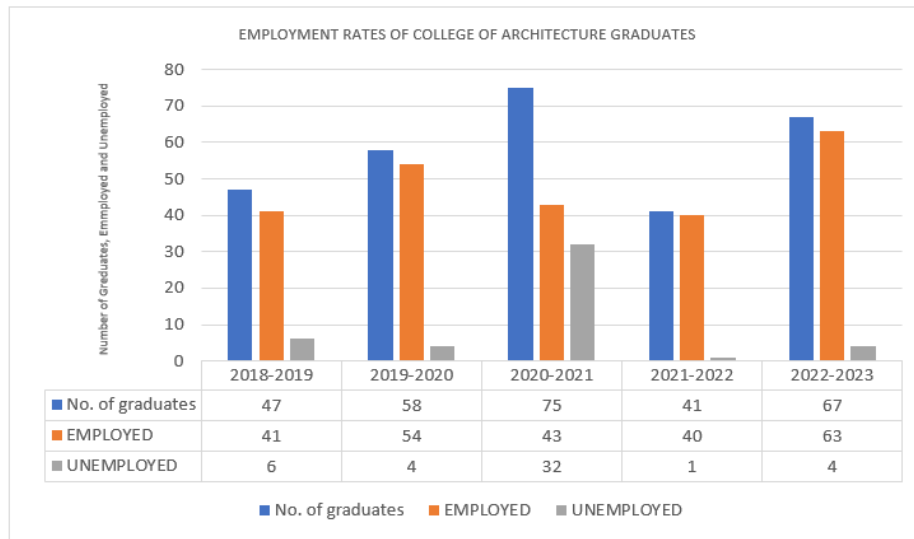


Figure 2. Employment Rates of NEUST Architecture Graduates by Year (2019-2023)

The data clearly shows that the NEUST architecture program has been successful in preparing graduates for employment, even amidst challenges such as the pandemic. The results are consistent with those found by Marmolejo (2016), who highlighted the need for dynamic, industry-aligned education to enhance graduate employability. The steady employment rates, despite external economic disruptions, demonstrate that NEUST's curriculum is robust and adaptive, providing graduates with essential skills and practical experience.

These findings are also in line with Esteban et al. (2016), who argued that higher education institutions that engage closely with industry stakeholders produce graduates who are better suited to meet market demands. NEUST's performance could serve as a model for similar institutions aiming to align academic programs with evolving industry needs.

4. Conclusions

This study highlights the critical role of curriculum alignment with industry requirements in achieving high employment rates for architecture graduates at NEUST. With 84% of graduates successfully employed in relevant fields, the findings emphasize the importance of practical, industry-focused academic programs. The study contributes valuable insights into the adaptability and effectiveness of higher education institutions in responding to evolving market demands. Moreover, it reinforces the need for continuous collaboration between academia and industry to ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills and competencies required to excel in their careers.

These results serve as a foundation for ongoing curriculum development and refinement, offering a model for other institutions aiming to enhance graduate employability in the face of economic and social challenges.

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