

Employment Status of Architecture Graduates of the University of Northern Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the employment status of Architecture graduates of the University of Northern Philippines (UNP), Vigan City from 2001 to 2011. The study employed the descriptive-survey method of research using a survey-checklist and documentary analysis. It also utilized the internet in gathering information especially about the overseas contract workers and migrants.

The 166 respondents include registered and licensed architects (RLAs) who passed the Architect's Licensure Examination (ALE) administered by the Professional Regulation Commission-Professional Regulatory Board of Architecture (PRC-PRBoA), and those who have not passed or taken the ALE, casually termed as underboard. The frequency, percentage, and mean were used in treating the data.

The greatest number of respondents belongs to SY 2010-2011 while the least number comes from S.Y. 2008-2009. Most respondents are employed in the locality referring to the Province of Ilocos Sur where UNP is situated, while Metro Manila and overseas come close in vying for the second place of employment. CAD Technicians/Operators constitute most of the respondents followed by Architects. Majority of the respondents are employed as contractual, a status they prefer so that they are able to transfer to other jobs after end of contract. Most of them are employed in Architecture-related jobs as architects, architectural designers/inspectors, CAD technicians/operators, and draftsmen.

Keywords: employment status, architecture graduates, Architect's Licensure Examination, tracer study

INTRODUCTION

The Architect's Law RA 9266, defines Architecture as the art, science, or profession of planning, designing, and constructing buildings in their totality, taking into account their environment, in accordance with the principles of utility, strength, and beauty. Architectural practice encompasses the provision of professional services in connection with site, physical planning and design, construction, enlargement, conservation, renovation, remodeling, restoration, or alteration of a building or a group of buildings.

The same law also defines an architect as a person who is professionally and academically qualified, registered, licensed, and legally allowed under the Professional Regulation Commission-Professional Regulatory Board of Architecture (PRC-PRBOA) to practice architecture who shall affix his signature and seal on all architectural plans, drawings, specifications, and all other contract documents prepared by him or under his direct supervision.

On the other hand, an underboard performs architectural works under the supervision of an architect and can work in jobs related to architectural practice but cannot sign his name under or use the title "Architect" nor can he enjoy the rights and privileges of one.

Architecture as a discipline deduces from knowledge and skills from the sciences, humanities, and fine and applied arts. It applies itself to providing shelter to all activities of man in all places under varying conditions, understanding each place within distinctive physical, historical, cultural, social, political, and virtual environments. Our built environment is formed and transformed as a result of architectural proposals done by engaging with the spaces, buildings, cities, and landscapes where we live. Architectural study is centered on design.

Architectural education is part of the construction industry exerting an important influence on the way this industry changes and develops. During the course of architectural education, the knowledge, understanding, and skills developed are broad, holistic, and value-laden. Most undergraduates aim ultimately for professional licensure or accreditation or a related career.

The Bachelor of Science (BS) in Architecture program is a 5-year academic curricular program compliant with CHED Memorandum Order No. 61, s. 2006: Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Architecture Education with the goal to train

and develop students' proficiency on the theories, practices, and techniques of the architectural profession. The curriculum includes courses or fields of study related to architecture such as interior design, landscape architecture, urban design, urban planning, regional planning, environmental planning, housing, real estate development, educational management, business management, project management, construction management and technology, building administration and maintenance, engineering, and architectural research, as embodied in RA 9266 and the Architects' National Code.

Based on tuition fee rates for school year 2010-2011 (DOLE 2012), an Architecture degree costs around P30,000 to P45,000 per semester in private schools and universities while tuition fees in public educational institutions offering the same program would cost about 20 percent to 40 percent less.

Additionally, the curriculum requires a post-baccalaureate, pre-licensure two-year Diversified Training Experience (DTE) consisting of varied experiences in the different phases of architectural service. Within this period, graduates should become employed along the fields of architectural practice to earn their DTE.

Still, the ultimate goal of a graduate is to pass the Architect's Licensure Examination (ALE) to legally practice the profession of architecture. The ALE is conducted twice a year in the Philippines in January and June by the PRC-PRBoA, and once a year in November in the Middle East when the PRC-PRBoA goes to Qatar, KSA and UAE to give the examination. However, there are graduates who are not able to take the ALE while they continue to be employed in jobs related to architectural practice in the years that follow after the prescribed two-year DTE. Some also get to land in jobs divergent to their education and training.

Employment is highly competitive among graduates of Architecture in the Philippines. In urbanized centers in the Philippines, primarily Manila, such as the University of Santo Tomas (UST), University of the Philippines (UP), Far Eastern University (FEU), Mapua Institute of Technology (MIT) and Saint Louis University (SLU) in Baguio City, the number of Architecture graduates in these institutions is relatively high, while in the University of Northern Philippines (UNP) where the program has been offered since 1971 – is a provincial state institution producing an average of 20 graduates a year, thus, making the job hunt stiffer.

The UNP College of Architecture maintains a record of its graduates and ALE passers. However, there are no updated records or documents as to who are

gainfully employed commensurate to their architecture education and training that prepared them to work in the industry.

It is on this premise that this research was conducted. The UNP College of Architecture hopes to trace the employment competitiveness of its graduates along place of employment, work status, and work assignments. The results will provide a basis for the College to continue improving its curriculum, teaching methods, approaches, and the learning styles of students as well.

The study aimed to determine the employment status of the graduates- both RLAs and underboard- of the College of Architecture, University of Northern Philippines, Vigan City, Ilocos Sur from School Years 2001 to 2011 in terms of year of graduation, place of employment, work assignment, and work status, and work related to the degree.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) was created through Republic Act No. 7722, also known as the Higher Education Act of 1994, to supervise tertiary and graduate education. Its mandate includes promotion of quality education, adopting appropriate steps that ensure accessibility of education to all, and protecting and ensuring academic freedom for continued intellectual growth, advancement of learning and research, development of responsible and effective leadership, education of high-level professionals, and enrichment of historical and cultural heritage.

Under CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) no. 61, s. 2006, a school offering Architecture is required to follow a curriculum relevant to the present needs and latest international standards which will provide students with comprehensive knowledge, skill, and competence in the field; the totality of their growth and development within the framework of democratic ideals and values; and the preservation, conservation, and promotion of Filipino architectural heritage within the global context.

Thus, CHED, through its Technical Panel for Architecture, Engineering, and Technology Education has formulated a *Graduates Competency Standards for the Bachelor of Science In Architecture* to attune the architecture program to the goals and mission of CHED and the nation and make architecture education responsive to the growing demands for human resources in business and industrial world. Below is a list of the competency standards:

1. Develop communication skills;

2. Initiate and conduct architectural research and development for the advancement of the profession;
3. Design the built environment in the context of ecological balance and sustainable development and conservation of cultural and historical heritage;
4. Provide professional services in the realm of the scope of practice in architecture;
5. Maintain active membership in the accredited professional organization to establish local and international linkages and networks;
6. Participate actively in legislative and policy-making concerns affecting the profession;
7. Participate in the evaluation of the architectural education program and its relevance to current trends and development;
8. Act as mentors to the aspirants of the profession through diversified training and apprenticeship program;
9. Upholds the dignity and integrity of the professional and promotes the highest ethical standards in the practice of the profession;
10. Develop conceptual knowledge in building science and technical system and;
11. Understand architectural business and organization.

Moreover, the UK-based Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE) gives a list of abilities or experiences that a graduate in architecture typically must have in order to be employed:

1. Worked in an interdisciplinary environment and collaborate with others;
2. Has responded to a broad range of interests including social and ethical concerns;
3. Could communicate effectively using visual, graphic, written, and verbal means;
4. Could **work** autonomously in a self-directed manner, thereby developing the practices of reflection and of lifelong learning;
5. Willing to work in teams;
6. Manages time and work to deadlines;
7. Uses digital and electronic communication techniques;
8. Could analyze problems and use innovation, logical and lateral thinking in their solution;
9. Be flexible and adaptable in approaching an issue, problem or opportunity.

Additionally, CEBE provides other employability-related **skills** which can be developed that include the ability to:

1. conceptualize, investigate, and develop the design of three-dimensional objects and spaces;
2. create architectural designs that integrate social, aesthetic, and technical requirements;
3. conceive architectural designs on a specific site in the context of urban planning;
4. research, formulate, and respond to programs or briefs appropriate to specific contexts and circumstances;
5. form considered judgments about the spatial, aesthetic, technical and social qualities of a design within the scope and scale of a wider environment;
6. reflect upon and then relate ideas to a design and to the work of other;
7. produce designs that demonstrate the integrative relationship of structure; building materials and constructional elements and the relationship between climate, service systems, and energy supply;
8. exercise informed and reflective judgement in the development of sustainable design;
9. use a range of visual, written, and verbal techniques to communicate architectural designs and ideas;
10. select and use design using design-based software and multimedia applications; and
11. listen and engage in informed dialogue.

On the other hand, Navarro, et al., (2003) in their study stated that employability is a measure of the productivity of education because it is reflective of the economic value added to the person who underwent the educative process; that one of the indicators that a school has fulfilled its mission statement is through the employability of its graduates, adding that employability is usually measured in terms of waiting time.

Further, Navarro, et al. mentioned Santillan's (1988) study where majority of graduates gained employment ranging from 10-12 months after graduation and that the most needed qualification was the Bachelor's degree or title. Said study recognized that employability is affected by two economic factors that affect job-hunting: 1) scarcity of employment opportunities and 2) manpower needs of the community that may not relate to the skills training of graduates. The study also

affirms that these concerns directly relate to the country's brain-drain characterized by a large number of graduates seeking employment abroad because of lack of employment in the home country.

Likewise, Navarro, et al. (2003) confirm that drafting subjects are basic to the jobs of Architecture and Engineering graduates who are mostly employed in construction firms.

The Department of Employment (DOLE) published the *Employment Guide for Students and Jobseekers* (2012) to help students and jobseekers start their employment options and how to prepare for their choice. This *Guide* is organized along three options for employment: (a) wage employment, whether local or overseas; (b) self-employment; and (c) skills training and upgrading of qualifications. The wage employment option covers the normal job cycle ranging from job application to termination of employment. The self-employment option deals with the entrepreneurship or practice of profession cycle. The skills training and upgrading of qualifications option provides the individuals with the information on how to improve their chances of employability by acquiring skills and furthering their studies.

Below is an extraction from the *Guide* which gives the state of local employment vis-a-vis in-demand land-based jobs under overseas employment opportunities for architecture and related fields:

Local Employment Opportunities

Industry	Hard-To-Fill Jobs
Construction	Engineer (Civil, Electrical, Design , Structural, Planning & Contract)
Ownership Dwellings & Real Estate	Civil Engineer, Mechanical Engineer, Surveyor, Architect

Overseas Employment Opportunities: In-demand Land-based Jobs

Major Occupational Category	Industry/Sector/Skill	Country
Professional, Technical, Medical, and Related Workers	Architecture & Engineering: AutoCAD Draftsmen, Firefighters, Engineers (Civil, Piping, Design, Scheduling/Planning, Chemical, Mechanical, HVAC Design, Structural, Bio-Medical, Communication and Agricultural), Emergency Medical Technicians	Malaysia, Macau, Middle East, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Norway, KSA, Libya, Seychelles, Macau, US, Korea, Middle East, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Norway , Brunei, Singapore, Taiwan, Switzerland, Israel, Japan
Production & Related Workers	Construction Workers: Aluminum Installer, Carpenter, Concrete Electric/Mechanical Assistants, Electricians, Erectors, Fabricators, Finishers, Draftsmen, Drillers, Foremen, Heavy equipment Operators, Helpers/ Watchmen, Mason, Pipe Fitters, Plaster Painters, Plasterers, Plumbers, Riggers, Safety Officers, Welders, Mechanics	Brunei, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Taiwan, CNMI, Poland, Germany, Cyprus, Libya, Oman, UAE, KSA, Korea, Poland, Germany, Cyprus, Libya, Oman

In this same material, DOLE supplies the information on the salary of architects which is viewed as attractive. An architect who works in the country receives a monthly salary ranging from P18,000-P40,000 depending on the type of employer, while Filipino architects employed in the Middle East receive a monthly salary of \$1,500 to \$3,000, again depending on the type of employer. In other foreign countries, pay and benefits range higher than local rates.

DOLE moreover gives a picture of employment opportunities for architects where on the overall, job opportunities are good in spite of the fact that economic

fluctuations, particularly in the construction industry, affect the demand for architects. Yet, the steady growth of non-residential and residential construction continues to provide enough job opportunities for practicing architects. Demographic trends also support the increase in demand for the profession because an increasing population will require construction of more houses, schools, health care facilities such as hospitals, commercial office spaces, entertainment facilities, shopping centers, and other types of structures. A recent and exciting trend is the outsourcing of local architectural firms by foreign firms for production of construction drawings of projects which is expected to be sustained with the unprecedented growth in the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines. Opportunities for overseas employment are also expanding particularly in the Middle East countries because of construction boom brought about by a prospering economy. Increasingly, there are better opportunities for Computer-Aided Drafting and Design (CADD) technology because CADD is now the practice of all architectural firms.

Architects may also be employed in the industries of construction, real estate, renting, and business activities.

The horizon for career advancement for Architects is bright, according to DOLE. Architects eventually manage entire projects when they have acquired considerable experience in their work, others may advance to supervisory or managerial positions in large establishments, some become partners in established firms while others may set up their own architectural firms and become independent practitioners. For career moves, architects may also enter related fields of graphic, interior, or industrial design; urban planning; real estate development; civil engineering; and construction management.

DOLE also gives a list of Tasks that an architect performs:

1. Provides pre-design services - conducting feasibility and environmental impact studies, selecting a site, and specifying the requirements the design must meet; prepares drawings and a report presenting ideas for the client to review;
2. Develops final construction plans;
3. Prepares cost analysis;
4. May assist client in obtaining construction bids, selecting a contractor, and negotiating the construction contract;

5. Visits construction site to ensure that the contractor is following the design, using specified materials and meeting the specified standards for the quality of work;
6. Makes long-range planning for land development; and
7. Directs activities of workers engaged in preparing drawings and specification documents.

Further, DOLE lists the Skills and Competencies of an architect:

1. Ability to visually communicate ideas to clients;
2. Ability to conceptualize and understand spatial relationships;
3. Artistic and drawing ability;
4. Excellent communication (written & oral) skills;
5. Computer literacy- knowledge of computer - aided design and drafting (CADD);
6. Strong organizational skills with attention to details; and
7. Managerial & supervisory skills.

Also, the Agency gives the Physical Attributes and Characteristics of an architect, namely: Creative; Artistic; Responsive to client's needs; and Ability to work independently or as part of a team.

The Agency likewise lists AutoCAD under the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Programs/Courses with High Employment Rates.

The importance of quality education, training and experience of the Filipino architect is all the more highlighted with the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for Architectural Services to be implemented in 2015. The Philippines is a member-country signatory together with the governments of Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The prime objective of the ASEAN-MRA 2015 is to facilitate mobility of Architects within the ASEAN Region by 2015.

The ASEAN Architect, to be recognized, must have, among other qualifications, acquired practical and diversified experience of not less than ten years of continuous practice of architecture after graduation, of which at least five years shall be after licensure/registration and at least two years of which shall be in responsible charge of significant architectural works. The eligible ASEAN Architect

shall be permitted to work as a Foreign Registered Architect of the Host (ASEAN) Country in collaboration with an architect of the host country or in independent practice within the area of his own recognized competency.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive-survey method of research and documentary analysis using the 2001 to 2011 UNP Registrar's Records of graduates to validate the responses of the respondents and the PRC ALE results for those who took the examination. The survey-checklist was used to elicit the school and work attributes of the respondents namely: year of graduation, place of employment, work assignment, work status, and work which may or may not be related to the degree. The research also utilized the internet in gathering information about the respondents especially the overseas contract workers and migrants. There were 166 architecture graduates from School Years 2001 – 2011 who served as respondents of this study. The frequency, percentage, and mean were used in the statistical treatment of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of Respondents According to Year of Graduation and Employment Status

The greatest number of respondents (29 or 17.6 %) belongs to SY 2010-2011. In descending order, this is followed by graduates of SY 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 with 19 (11.5%) respondents for each said School Year. Equally, there were 18 (10.8%) respondents in SYs 2002-2003 and 2003-2004, respectively. There were 16 (9.6 %) respondents in SY 2009-2010. SY 2002-2003 and SY 2003-2004 have the same number (8 or 10.8%) of respondents. Similarly, there were equal number (15 or 9.0%) of respondents in SY 2001-2002 and SY 2004-2005. In SY 2007-2008, there were nine (5.4 %) respondents. The least number (8 or 4.8%) of respondents belong to SY 2008-2009.

It is surmised that the greatest number of graduates were from SY 2010-2011 which could be a good indication that UNP is attracting more students to enroll in the BS Architecture program.

Place of Employment. There are 71 (42.8%) employed in the locality. Locality, as a place of employment refers to the Province of Ilocos Sur where UNP is situated. There are 49 (29.5%) employed in Metro Manila while 46 (27.7%) are employed overseas. It is evident that in Ilocos Sur alone, the professional services of

architects and related architectural jobs provided by the underboard are needed. Apparently, there is an increase in construction activities in the locality. The findings also imply that the Architecture profession is growing in demand locally and overseas.

Work Assignment. Almost half (46 or 27.7%) of the respondents are CAD Technicians/Operators, 33 (19.9%) are architects, an equal number of 29 (17.5%) work as draftsman and along other fields, respectively; 23 (13.9%) work as architectural designers; and the least (6 or 3.6%) are architectural inspectors. It can be generalized that the work assignments of the respondents are related to Architecture.

Work Status. Majority (109 or 65.7%) of the respondents work as contractual, 22 (13.3%) work as private practitioners who put up their own architectural office; 13 (7.8%) work in other fields, such as project-based construction; and 10 (6.0%) graduates have permanent positions in the government. It was reported by some respondents that they prefer to work as contractual because they do not want to stay long in one company and have the option to get out from their current job/s when opportunity for greener pastures are available for them.

Work Related to the Degree. Majority (144 or 86.7%) are employed as architects, architectural designers/inspectors, CAD technicians/operators, and draftsmen, while 22 (13.3%) work in jobs not related to their degree such as putting up entrepreneurial endeavors like t-shirt printing, working as office assistant, or into sales. The latter could be due to lack of job opportunities or inability to find jobs related to the degree or acceptance of job that came to be offered first or because of attractive pay.

CONCLUSIONS

A great number of respondents graduated during the School Year 2010-2011 which showed that UNP is attracting more students to enroll in the BS Architecture program.

Majority of the respondents are employed in the locality (Province of Ilocos Sur). However, there is relatively a large number of respondents who are employed in Metro Manila and overseas which implies that the Architecture profession is growing in demand locally and abroad.

Most of the respondents are CAD Technician/Operators, a work assignment in high demand now in the design and construction industry especially for the younger batch of graduates armed with very good skills in the latest CAD softwares.

Majority of the respondents work as contractual, a preference of the respondents who do not want to stay long in their present job and have the option to get out when opportunity for greener pastures are available for them.

Majority are employed in architecture-related jobs. This encompasses the employment of all graduates, both ALE passers who provide professional services in accordance with RA 9266, and the underboard who perform architectural works under the supervision of an architect and can work in jobs related to architectural practice but cannot use the title "Architect" or enjoy the rights and privileges of one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The UNP College of Architecture should continue to attract enrollees to the BS Architecture program by sustaining its good reputation as a producer of quality graduates competitive with other Philippine and foreign schools particularly those from the ASEAN. This can be achieved by regularly enhancing the curriculum and qualifications of its faculty to match the global needs of the industry. An immediate action would be the inclusion of latest softwares in the CAD courses to arm graduates with this particular technical skill. Consistently also, the College must imbue in the students the values of a good architect. The result would be increased demand for and faster employment of UNP graduates as overseas contract workers and as employees of well-known architectural firms in Manila and in the locality. Their excellent training and education will likewise allow them to make good choices in their employment.

While the UNP graduates find good Architecture-related employments, the College should encourage and inspire all graduates to take the Architect's Licensure Examination. Passing the ALE should be the ultimate goal of completing the 5-year academic program in architecture in order to legally practice the profession and to fully enjoy employment as an architect with the rights and privileges accorded in being as one.

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