



St. PAUL UNIVERSITY PHILIPPINES' QUALITY POLICY: FROM THE LENS OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

Inicia C. Bansig and Jesus B. Pizarro

St. Paul University Philippines Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines 3500

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education Institutions normally compete for student enrolment and one way to ensure their clients' continued patronage is to conduct customer satisfaction surveys to find out whether their clients had gratifying experiences with the institution's services and facilities. Surveys are done to find out whether the institution's quality policy, the promise it gave its clients is indeed realized. This study assessed the extent to which St. Paul University Philippines had succeeded in fulfilling its quality policy. Descriptive research design was utilized employing the use of a questionnaire. The data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test for independent samples and One-Way ANOVA. Results revealed that students are generally very highly satisfied with the University's services and facilities as well as their relationship with their teachers, fellow students, administrative personnel and office staff. The participants are very impressed with the overall quality of their academic experience in the University. From the lens of the graduate students, the University had succeeded to a great extent realizing its quality policy of "providing quality Catholic education to its stakeholders in a caring environment". The University, being an ISO-certified Catholic academic institution has lived up to its clients' promise to provide them with quality services and facilities making their experience in the University positive and truly reflective of a caring environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Customer feedback is an imperative for any organization be it in a business, educational or any service-oriented setting. Clients' opinions, recommendations and assessments concerning products and services received generally provide vital information and insight to further enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty and overall experience (Akçakanat, T., Kilikli, M., & Çarikçi, İ. H., 2015; Bone, *et. al*, 2017; Hu, *et.al.*, 2016). In a highly competitive world, organizations that develop products and provide services anchored on well-documented solicited or unsolicited customer feedbacks, either positive or negative, normally are the ones that end up enjoying strong competitive advantage over others. These organizations are able to sustain customer loyalty with most of their clients even becoming their avid customer advocates. These advocates in fact are the best marketing and promotions agents for the organization.

One of the service-oriented organizations where competition is perceived to be strong is among schools particularly Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). These institutions compete in terms of attracting students to enrol in their institution and are

thus compelled to develop and implement innovative and research-driven marketing strategies to entice prospective students to enrol or to keep their current students from not transferring to another school. In HEIs, student customer satisfaction surveys are normally done to determine areas or services that need to be sustained, problematic areas that require the implementation of intervention measures and to ensure that their students will have a positive experience with the institution. Ofir & Simonson (2001) pointed out that "customers' evaluations of quality and satisfaction are critical inputs in the development of marketing strategies" while Kara & De Shields (2004) said students' college experience is positively related to their satisfaction and intentions to stay at college or university.

Among the time-tested strategies employed by HEIs to guarantee students' positive experience and attain a high level of satisfaction is for HEIs to regularly monitor the realization of their crafted quality policy that enshrines their promised commitment to their clients. However, normally only HEIs that underwent internationally recognized quality assurance certifications such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have their quality policy. St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP), a government recognized and autonomous institution in the Northern region of the Philippines enjoys the distinction of being the first ISO-

***Corresponding author: Inicia C. Bansig**

St. Paul University Philippines Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines 3500

certified Catholic University in Asia. Being an ISO-certified, SPUP has for its quality policy “providing quality Catholic Paulinian education in a caring environment”. The University’s character as a Catholic institution of higher learning finds it essential to holistically develop and nurture its student-clients in an atmosphere of compassionate care and arduous zeal for quality and excellence.

The researchers of this study firmly believe that when an academic institution is able to carry-out or realize its promised commitment to its clients, there is a higher likelihood for the institution to sustain clients’ loyalty and even attract more possible enrollees to the different graduate school degree programs in the University. In a study done by Brown & Mazzarol (2009), their findings pointed out that “student loyalty is predicted by student satisfaction which is in turn predicted by the perceived image of the host university”. To ferret out SPUP’s success, while enjoying its image as an autonomous higher education institution in the Philippines, in carrying-out its much treasured quality policy, an evidence-based research done in the form of a customer feedback that would measure client satisfaction is needed, Thus this research.

Statement of the Problem

This study entitled “St. Paul University Philippines’ Quality Policy: From the Lens of the Graduate School Students’ Experience” sought to determine the graduate students’ feedback and assessment with respect to their experience on the quality of services and facilities provided by St. Paul University Philippines.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following:

1. What is the participants’ extent of satisfaction on the services rendered and office facilities of the University?
2. What is the participants’ evaluation on the overall quality of their academic experience in the university?
3. What is the participants’ assessment on the extent to which SPUP had succeeded in fulfilling its purpose of providing quality catholic Paulinian education in a caring environment?
4. What is the participants’ assessment on the extent of their satisfaction with respect to their relationship with other students, administrative personnel, office staff and with faculty members?
5. Is there a significant relationship in the participants’ extent of satisfaction on the services rendered and office facilities of the University and the following:
 - 5.1 overall quality of participants’ academic experience, relationship with other students, administrative personnel and office staff and with faculty members, and
 - 5.2 extent of SPUP's success in fulfilling its quality policy?

What are the participants’ suggestions to further improve the graduate students’ experience of the University’s services and facilities?

METHODS

Research Design

The research design used in the study is the descriptive research design. This was utilized because this study sought to describe the participants’ extent of satisfaction as regards their experiences in the University’s varied services as well as their valuable feedbacks.

Research Participants

The research participants of the study consisted of one hundred fifty-nine (159) randomly selected graduate school students enrolled during Academic Year 2016 – 2017. The participants are enrolled in the different programs both in the Master’s and Doctoral degree levels.

Table 1 shows the profile of the research participants grouped in terms of type, graduate level enrolled, gender, civil status and age range.

Table 1 Profile of the Research Participants

Participant’s Profile	Frequency Percentage	
Type of Graduate Student		
Started at SPUP	121	75.97
Transferred from another Institution	38	24.03
Graduate Level		
Masters Level	149	93.71
Doctoral Level	10	6.29
Gender		
Male	42	26.35
Female	117	73.65
Civil Status		
Single	97	61.11
Married	62	38.89
Age Range		
21 to 25 yrs	73	46.10
26 to 30 yrs	42	26.24
31 to 35 yrs	18	11.35
36 to 40 yrs	12	7.80
41 to 45 yrs	14	8.51
Total	159	100.00

Table 1 reveals that majority (75.97%) of the research participants’ started their journey to graduate school at SPUP. In terms of the level where the participants are enrolled, majority (93.71%) of them are enrolled in the Masters Level. With respect to the participants’ gender and civil status, majority of them are female (73.65%) and single (61.11%). In addition, figures in the said table reveal that most (46.10%) of the participants are relatively young belonging to the age bracket 21 to 25 years of age.

Data Gathering Tools

The principal data gathering tool that was utilized in this research is a researcher-made questionnaire that underwent the process of content validation and reliability analysis. The reliability analysis performed on the data gathered resulted to a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.948. Based on literature review, particularly on the study of Nunnally (1978; 1988), he stated that newly developed measures can be accepted with an alpha value of 0.60, otherwise, 0.70 should be used as the threshold. It can therefore be ascertained that the tool used for this study is more than acceptable in terms of its internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before gathering and collecting data, the researchers sought proper authorization and permission from the Director of

Research and Publications for the conduct of the study to ensure that it does not duplicate any ongoing researches being done by the other faculty and staff in the University. After getting clearance from the Research and Publications Office, the researchers submitted the study for ethics review by the members of the University's Institutional Ethics Review Committee to make sure that the study conforms to set ethical requirements in the conduct of research. Later the study was further subjected to an internal peer review process to elicit the comments and suggestions of research experts in the University to further improve the study before the start of the data gathering process.

The researcher-made questionnaire that was used as the primary gathering instrument for this study underwent the rigors of tool validation and try-out to ensure that it is both contently valid and reliable. It was subjected to expert content validation as well as reliability analysis procedures. After ascertaining the acceptability of the said instrument in terms of its adherence to set standards (i.e., Cronbach Alpha value), the instrument was administered to the graduate school student-participants.

Data gathered from the use of the questionnaire were collated and encoded using Microsoft Excel and later subjected to statistical data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collected were tabulated, analyzed, interpreted and summarized using both descriptive and inferential statistics. To facilitate the process of data analysis, the Statistical Product and Services Solutions (SPSS) Version 18 was utilized. Specifically, the following statistical tools were employed:

Frequency Count and Percentage. These were used to describe the profile of the participants in terms of their kind, gender, civil status, age and graduate school level attended.

Weighted Mean. This was utilized to describe the overall response of the participants on a) their extent of satisfaction on the services rendered and office facilities, b) their evaluation on the overall quality of their academic experience in the university, c) the extent to which SPUP has succeeded in fulfilling its purpose of providing quality catholic Paulinian education in a caring environment and d) the extent of their satisfaction with respect to their relationship with other students, administrative personnel and office staff and with faculty members.

To facilitate the interpretation of the weighted mean responses of the participants, the following range of mean values were categorized as follows:

Mean Range	Description
4.20 – 5.00	Very Highly Satisfied/ Very Highly Impressive/Very Highly Successful
3.40 – 4.19	Highly Satisfied/ Highly Impressive/Highly Successful
2.60 – 3.39	Satisfied/Moderately Impressive/ Successful
1.80 – 2.59	Moderately Dissatisfied/ Less Impressive/Moderately Successful
1.00 – 1.79	Dissatisfied/ Not Impressive/Not Successful

Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This was used to test for significant relationship between participants' extent of satisfaction on the services rendered and office facilities and the following variables: 1) overall quality of their academic experience in the university, 2) extent to which SPUP has

succeeded in fulfilling its quality policy and 3) extent of their satisfaction with respect to their relationship with other students, administrative personnel, office staff and with faculty members.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 Mean Response Distribution on the Participants' Extent of Satisfaction on the Services Rendered and Office Facilities of the University

Office/Facility	Mean	Qualitative Description
Classroom	4.45	Very Highly Satisfied
Defense Room	4.33	Very Highly Satisfied
Research Office	4.47	Very Highly Satisfied
Registrar's Office	4.39	Very Highly Satisfied
Business Affairs Office	4.43	Very Highly Satisfied
Guidance Center	4.44	Very Highly Satisfied
Canteen	4.17	Highly Satisfied
Clinic	4.33	Very Highly Satisfied
Computer Laboratory	4.44	Very Highly Satisfied
Science Laboratory	4.33	Very Highly Satisfied
Library	4.58	Very Highly Satisfied
Overall Mean	4.40	Very Highly Satisfied

Table 2 reveals that the graduate school students are generally very highly satisfied with the services and office facilities of the University. This is attributed to the University's unwavering commitment to provide its students with the best quality of services and facilities that it can possibly give. The University continuously subjects itself to the process of continuous improvement by regularly conducting customer satisfaction surveys and seriously looks into areas where satisfaction results are low. Intervention measures are normally designed and implemented to address areas of low satisfaction.

Table 3 Frequency and Percentage Distribution and Mean Response on the Participants' Evaluation on the Overall Quality of their Academic Experience in the University

How do you evaluate the overall quality of your academic experience in the University?	Frequency	Percentage
Moderately Impressive	13	8.17
Highly Impressive	66	41.51
Very Highly Impressive	80	50.31
Total	159	100.00
Mean	3.50	Highly Impressive

Data contained in Table 3 reveal that the graduate school students assessed the quality of their academic experience at SPUP as highly impressive (M=3.50). The student-participants' highly impressive assessment implies that they had a positive experience with the services noting in Table 2 that they too, have high extent of satisfaction as customers. De Shields Jr., *et. al.* (2005) stated that indeed, students who have positive experience in higher education have higher likelihood to obtain greater level of satisfaction than those who do not have a positive experience. Inferential test results too concerning the participants' overall quality of academic experience in the University reveal that the participants' evaluation is relatively the same regardless of type, level and age. However, with respect to participants' gender and civil status, male or married students had given significantly higher ratings compared to female or single participants.

Table 4 Frequency and Percentage Distribution on the Participants' Assessment on the Extent to which SPUP Succeeded in Fulfilling Its Purpose of Providing Quality Catholic Paulinian Education in a Caring Environment

To what extent do you assess SPUP's success in fulfilling its purpose of providing quality Catholic Paulinian education in a caring environment?	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Successful	102	64.24
Successful	55	34.44
Moderately Successful	2	1.32
Total	159	100.00
Mean	3.63	Highly Successful

When the participants were asked to assess the extent to which the University had succeeded in realizing its quality policy, their overall mean response revealed that SPUP has been highly successful with respect to this concern. This implies that SPUP, being accorded the distinction as ISO-certified, truly has live-up to its promise to its student-clients. It implies that the University's quality policy anchored on providing products and services nurtured in a caring environment is not only a lip-service quality policy but one that is actually felt and experienced by its students and other stakeholders as well. In a Catholic University like St. Paul University Philippines, it has conditioned its entire workforce to consistently live out witnessing its professed values and charism founded on Christian love and care for others. Its dictum "Caritas Christi Urget Nos (The Charity of Christ Impels Us)" encapsulates its essence as a Catholic institution of higher learning.

Table 5 Mean Response Distribution on the Participants' Assessment on the Extent of their Satisfaction with respect to their Relationship with Other Students, Administrative Personnel and Office Staff and with Faculty Members

Area of Assessment	Mean	Qualitative Description
Relationship with other students	4.49	Very Highly Satisfied
Relationship with Administrative Personnel and Office Staff	4.32	Very Highly Satisfied
Relationship with Faculty Members	4.48	Very Highly Satisfied

It can be gleaned from the data in Table 5 that the graduate school student participants generally are very highly satisfied with respect to the extent of their satisfaction in their relationship with other students, administrative personnel and office staff and with faculty members and this extent of satisfaction is true regardless of the participants' socio-demographic profile except type. This implies that the students have smooth relationship with their fellow students and the key service providers in the University which include the personnel and office staff and the faculty. When conducting customer satisfaction surveys in schools, it is equally important to know how satisfied are the students with the services given by the key service providers because when educational institutions try to improve student satisfaction, it should not underestimate the quality of services that its students derive from its administrative staff (Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker, & Grøgaard, 2002) and its teaching force. Students tend to stay and maintain their enrolment in a school where the environment is conducive for learning and where the students find delight relating, sharing, learning and interacting with fellow students, with support staff and their teachers in a caring learning landscape.

Table 6 Test for Significant Relationship in the Participants' Extent of Satisfaction on the Services Rendered and Office Facilities of the University, Overall Quality of Participants' Academic Experience, Relationship with Other Students, Administrative Personnel and Office Staff and with Faculty Members and Extent of SPUP's Success in fulfilling its Quality Policy

Variables Correlated	Pearson r	P-value
Participants' Extent of Satisfaction on the Services Rendered and Office Facilities of the University	Overall quality of Participants' Academic Experience in the University	.571** Less than 0.001
	Relationship with Other Students, Administrative Personnel and Office Staff and with Faculty Members	.450** Less than 0.001
	Extent of SPUP's success in fulfilling its Quality Policy	.440** Less than 0.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson r results in Table 6 reveal that there exists a significant positive relationship between the participants' extent of satisfaction on the services rendered and office facilities of the university and the overall quality of participants' academic experience, relationship with other students, administrative personnel and office staff and with faculty members and the extent of SPUP's success in fulfilling its quality policy

The participants gave the following suggestions to further improve the graduate students' experience of the University's services and facilities:

1. The staff personnel in the Registrar's Office in-charge of the concerns of the Graduate School should be more approachable.
2. The Graduate School Office should be more spacious and have more office staff to attend to the needs of the graduate students taking into consideration the increasing trend of enrolment in the various academic programs.
3. The University should have a faculty or staff coordinator to attend to the needs and concerns of online graduate students.

CONCLUSION

In an institution accorded with the distinction of being ISO-certified, the realization of its quality policy is undeniably always considered as vital to its existence and sustainability. SPUP, having enjoyed its status as ISO-certified for more than a decade now, has lived up to its adherence and advocacy to quality and excellence in terms of its programs and services as evidenced by its consistent high ratings given by its clients and general stakeholders which include students, parents, community and industry partners. High customer satisfaction ratings from clients speak of the institution's success in achieving its quality policy anchored on care and concern for the holistic development of its student-clients. The sustained high ratings that the University consistently gets from its clients enabled the University to enlist their loyalty. The University's serious and relentless effort to regularly elicit clients' feedback and its receptiveness in dealing with clients' constructive criticisms have enabled the University to attract more and more students to enroll in the different graduate school programs as reflected in the rising trend of enrolment for the past 5 years.

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