

## LOW TURN OUT OF BSU GRADUATE STUDENTS, WHAT CAN BE DONE?

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### HIGHLIGHTS

✓ The difficulties of Graduate School (GS) students on writing the technical parts of research, following the institutional form and style coupled with other challenges like time constraints, financial problems, health concerns, advisee-adviser relationships and repercussions of the pandemic, affected the completion of their theses or dissertations that resulted to low turn-out of graduates.

✓ Securing Certificate of Precondition on the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) facilitated by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) also delayed the completion of their theses, specifically those who conducted Indigenous Knowledge-related research.

✓ The facilitating factors that helped the GS students complete their Graduate Studies on the given time frame are: varied motivations to complete graduate studies, degree program curriculum, research competencies, research mentoring, school policies and programs.

✓ Amidst the numerous difficulties of completing a graduate degree program, completing their graduate degrees opened new opportunities for them like employment, promotion, new designations, research, opportunities and networks.



### INTRODUCTION

Since world-class education entails students and professionals to produce quality research work, understanding the experiences of Graduate School students in completing their theses or dissertations is needed. Their narratives will provide a moderate generalization that can generate possible solutions to alleviate student difficulties in conducting research.

Whilst conducting research is proven to contribute to the development of a particular field of study, the proficiency requirements in scientific work pose challenges when pursuing a graduate degree.

In Benguet State University, among the estimated 480 Graduate School enrollees in the second semester of SY 2019-2020, only 100 students submitted an endorsed research draft. Among those 100 who submitted, only around 50 were approved for final defense and binding (BSU Graduate School Staff, personal communication, June 3, 2020). Furthermore, within a usual time frame to complete a graduate degree course, it is observed that majority of the students exceeded their supposed residency of five years for a Master's Degree and seven

years for a Doctorate Degree (Graduate School Bulletin, 2001). For most of them, this delay is due to the failure to complete the thesis or dissertation. This is due to several challenges related with the advisory committee, institution and personal constraints (Banes et al., 2020).

This study looked into the context of BSU GS students in conducting a research. It aimed to explore the students' research experiences in completing a thesis or dissertation and to generate recommendations from students and faculty. The intention is to strengthening graduate school programs of the University as well as promote of research mentoring between faculty members and GS students.



## METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive qualitative exploratory research. The case observed was the experiences of GS students in completing a thesis or dissertation in relation to the different challenges affecting it. Narratives and scripts were utilized to capture the localized and contextualized experiences of BSU GS students in conducting research. Interview and focused group discussion were used to collect data from the key informants.

Data were triangulated programs coming from degree earners of both Masters and Doctorate from 2015 to 2021, advisers and panel members and Graduate School personnel.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data gathered from the key informants.



Figure 1. Number of Research Participants



## FINDINGS

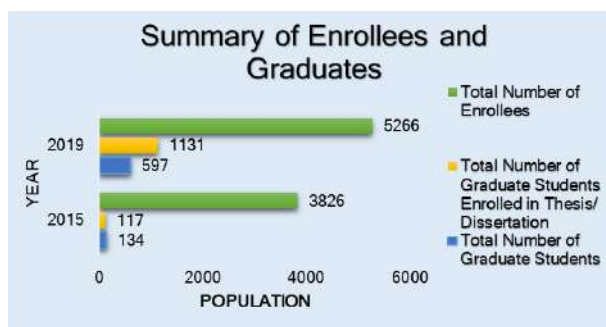


Figure 2. Summary of Enrolles and Graduates

### DIFFICULTIES IN COMPLETING RESEARCH

#### Writing Thesis or Dissertation

Even if the students were acquainted with research in their academic subjects, several students still encounter difficulties in writing their paper. According to the advisers and the graduate school personnel, writing the paper itself is the top difficulty of students in writing a thesis or dissertation.

The initial difficulty that the graduate students experienced when they enrolled their thesis was the conceptualization of research topics and or problems.

Another observation of the advisers in relation to students' proposed research topic is the value laden within the paper and its contribution to the scientific community or in general.

A general comment from the advisers is the difficulty of students to connect themselves to the study which they decided to explore, considering their current work and to foresee the significance of the research results. Undecided on what topic to be researched as well as the significance of the research can contribute is one reason that delays students for a semester or more.

Writing the background of the study and conceptual frameworks, organizing related literatures, analyzing the results, conclusion and recommendations are the common difficulties highlighted by the students which was affirmed by their panel members and advisers. However, among these research processes, the analysis of data is the most mentioned reason that delays the completion of their manuscript.

#### Technical Formatting

The strict implementation of formatting the manuscripts affected the student's motivation in writing. Students expressed their annoyance and dissatisfaction with the firm implementation of these format guidelines. According to some students, they have a greater difficulty of formatting their paper over the conduct of research given that they are not technically knowledgeable. Students shared that they can reach up to several drafts and so they are disappointed. With the difficulty of complying, students did not continue their study. Other students were able to manage by seeking assistance from the GS staff. However, both advisers and students acknowledge that the policy being implemented adds to the quality of paper, nonetheless, this should not discourage the students. Some advisers suggested that the strict formatting of the paper should be done after the final defense since the paper should still be changed considering the panel members could still give inputs.

#### Other Challenges that Affect Conduct of Research

Other challenges encountered by GS students in completing their research are lack of time, financial constraints and health concerns. Oftentimes, students cannot focus in the implementation of their study because of assumed multiple roles. Their time is distributed at home, work, social organizations and even performing religious obligations.

These multiple roles limit the time they can allot in writing their research. Moreover, some students face financial constraints most especially to those who underwent FPIC process facilitated by the NCIP personnel because students need to feed the gathered research participants for the consent seeking.

Students who are battling with illnesses and those who are pregnant also opt to rest or stop their studies.



## FACILITATING FACTORS OF FINISHING RESEARCH

- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of graduate students in completing their research
- Research-based curriculum of GS degree programs
- Research mentoring

Figure 3. Facilitating Factors of Finishing Research

## FACILITATING FACTORS OF COMPLETING RESEARCH

### Motivations in enrolling to graduate school

Research participants reasoned that they pursued higher studies because they wanted to advance their career and continue improving themselves. Majority of the students work in the academe, therefore, it is given that their main interest is for better career path, promotion and professional growth. Faculty members who are eyeing for higher ranks and who intend to enter in the public education are bounded by memorandum orders requiring them to have masters and doctorate units or degree. These are manifested in the policies of Civil Service Commission, Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education.

On the other hand, some degree earners were intrinsically motivated. A number of them mentioned that they wanted to earn a degree not only for promotion but a means for them to improve themselves.

With these motivations, despite the difficult demands of earning a degree, students pursue in finishing their thesis or dissertation.

### Research Based-Curriculum

The delivery of academic subjects helped the graduate students in the development of their research skills. According to the participants, the academic course requirements are geared towards developing a research. With this, it enabled them to acquire research skills such as the preparation of research proposals, data collection, analysis of data and among others. Interestingly, research outputs submitted in the courses were developed and turned as their thesis or dissertation. Thus, in many ways, the designed curriculum and the competencies implicitly contributed in the completion of research work.

In the improvement of research skills, the GS faculty members played a significant role. In the course of learning, faculty researchers shared meaningful research experiences which students would learn from it. This implies that research skills of students can possibly be affected by the research skills of faculty members.

However, it should be noted that not all students have well-developed research skills. Advisers have associated this to several factors such as the compliance attitude of students in making research papers, disinterest in reading, lack of field experience and foundation of research.

Nonetheless, the research trainings of students together with the knowledge earned in their academic subjects contributed to the writing of their thesis and dissertation.

### Research mentoring/Coaching

The presence of mentors contribute in the success of earning a degree. In the course of research implementation, a mentoring relationship was formed between the adviser-advisee, adviser-advisory committee members and researcher-other researcher. Students who successfully completed their research associated their success to the positive mentoring approach of their mentor. Majority of the students consider their advisers as their mentor since their advisers imparted research knowledge and guided them in all the phases of their research.

Graduate students also acknowledged that through the presence of their mentors, they did not give in finishing their research requirement.

Still, not all students nurtured the mentoring relationship with their advisers and panel members. Few students have expressed that their advisers did not give much attention when assistance was being expected. Some students also clamored that in order to avoid this, advisers must limit accepting advisees if they cannot perform the function of an adviser. In response to this, advisers acknowledged that sometimes support is limited since they have other duties apart from being an adviser.

One area where the advisers exerted extra effort in supporting their advisees is on research writing. While students had their own mechanism to cope with the difficulty, such as taking a break from their work and focusing on writing, some consulted their panel members.

### Repercussions and Innovations during the Pandemic

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic has positively, and negatively affected the research implementation of students. But for most, it negatively affected their research implementation. Students who were starting to collect their data considered the pandemic to be bane given the travel restrictions. Some students changed their methodology since it would not be feasible given the repercussions of the crisis. Students who gathered data before the pandemic considered the imposition of the lockdown to be boon since they took the community quarantine as an opportunity to analyze and write their research.

In response to the challenges of the pandemic, the GS office designed a mechanism to help the students to address the issues such as the virtual presentation and defense. These accommodated students who cannot be present physically. This initiative done by the GS office helped students complete the final phase of their research particularly to students who were nearly reaching the prescribed years of residency.

### Impact of Finishing a Graduate Degree

Several positive impacts of finishing their degree identified by the graduate students are employment mobility and professional growth. The primary motive of enrolling to graduate school for job promotion was realized. This is evident with the data that the majority of the students have been promoted in their jobs. Aside from the economic benefit of acquiring a higher degree, knowledge progress was also identified as one impact. From the subject knowledge contents, teaching strategies and research experiences, degree holders were able to have knowledge and skill development.

Furthermore, their academic research experiences that they had motivated them to be actively engaged in research. Majority of the degree earners narrated that they conducted other researches which contributed to their field, while others were able to present in public forums and publish their thesis in reputable journals.





## CALL TO ACTION



The College Graduate School Offices should continue conducting learning sessions such as seminars, trainings and workshops on research writing for graduate students. These trainings can be done in collaboration with the Research and Extension centers or institutes of the University.



The College Graduate School Offices should consider requiring enrollees of both master's and doctorate degrees to submit a concept paper before enrolling their thesis/dissertation writing.



Graduate School faculty members should strengthen research mentoring between teachers (advisory committee) and students (advisees) to produce quality research. The research- based curriculum need to be sustained.



College Graduate School Offices should consider updating the College Graduate School format being used to be at par with the editions used by international publications.



The College Graduate School is encouraged to design an electronic template on the formatting of paper to help the students who are struggling technically.



Rigorous checking of the form and style can be done after the final defense for students to focus on the content of their research.



## MAJOR REFERENCES

Banes, G. G., Lucyao, S.S., and Banez, A.A., Mapping the Experiences of BSU Graduate Students in Completing their Thesis and Dissertation: A Narrative of Research Experiences Proceedings of BSU Annual In-House Review, September 8-10, 2021, BSU-Research and Extension, La Trinidad, Benguet.



## ABOUT THE MATERIAL

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