

**Evaluation of the Practicum Program of the International
Studies Department
Jovito Salon, Jr.
Rosario Mielmia C. Aquino, Ph.D**

INTRODUCTION:

The on the job training program with the course title “Practicum” of the Department of International Studies (IS), College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) of San Beda College Alabang (SBCA), provides work experience with a college-approved training establishment in an area related to Foreign Service, Public Administration and Tourism. Emphasis is placed on integrating classroom learning with related work experience. (SBCA-CAS, 2013) Upon completion of the program, students should be able to evaluate career selection, demonstrate employability skills and satisfactorily perform work-related competencies. (TRM190 Syllabus, 2015)

Since the general revision of the CAS syllabi in 2007, the International Studies Department increased the required number of training hours to 400 from 200, hence increasing the number of the units of TRM190 Practicum from three to six.

The increase in number of practicum hours was a result of consultation with industry practitioners and the alumni. The common opinion of the consultants was that 400 hours would better prepare the students for employment by giving them more time to hone their skills and prepare them mentally and emotionally for the workplace.

OBJECTIVES:

This endeavor aimed to evaluate in a systematic and objective manner the practicum program of the International Studies Department – its policy, implementation and results.

This research paper was undertaken to review the practicum course of the department in preparation for the college-wide re-engineering of the On-the-Job Training program. It was done to determine its most effective elements so appropriate recommendations for its retention and its strengthening can be made. In the same manner, it also aimed to point out areas that are wanting, so corrective measures can be recommended.

This study is limited to the practicum program undertaken in tourism-allied companies and the evaluation was conducted from the perspective of the former student-trainees (alumni).

METHODOLOGY:

The researchers used as a tool, the *Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model*, a four-level evaluative instrument, created specifically for training programs. The four levels of evaluation are: (1) the reaction of the student and their thoughts about the training experience; (2) the student's resulting learning and increase in knowledge from the training experience; (3) the student's behavioral change and improvement after applying the skills on the job; and (4) the results or effects that the student's performance has on the business.

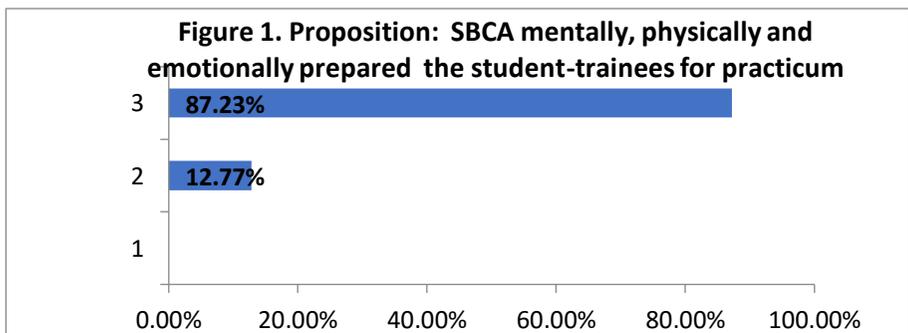
Level 1 (Reaction) seeks to know the degree to which the experience was valuable (satisfaction), whether they felt engaged, and whether they felt the training was relevant. *Level 2 (Learning)* determines whether participants acquired the intended knowledge, skills and attitudes as a result of the training. Level 3 ascertains participants' behaviors change as a result of the training – basically whether the knowledge and skills from the training are then applied on the job and Level 4 finds out whether desired outcomes are as a result of the training and the training. (Kirkpatrick, 2016)

From a total population of 161, purposive sampling technique was adopted in this endeavor inasmuch as this is the most effective method to study a specific cultural domain. The researchers disseminated the questionnaire to the IS alumni through social media using the online groups of the different IS batches of 2014, 2015, 2016. A sample size of 94 was used.

Findings

1st Level Evaluation: Reaction

A. Mental, physical and emotional preparedness to undertake the practicum program:



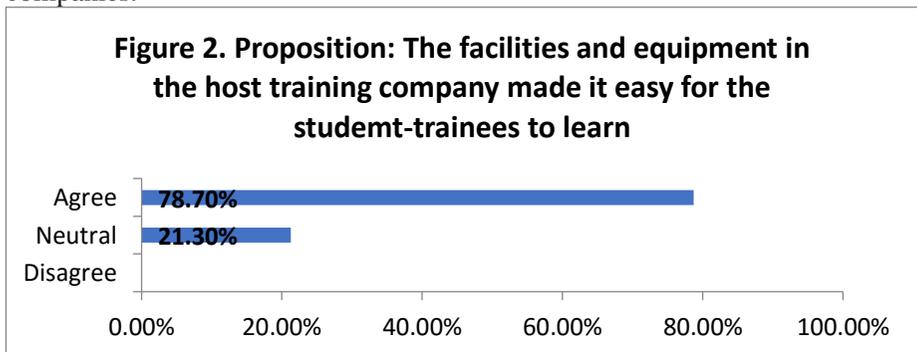
With no single respondent disagreeing to the proposition, 87% overwhelming responded that they were prepared physically and emotionally to undertake the practicum program. Under the present curriculum, by the time the student takes his practicum, he is expected to have completed 133 units of the 175 units required to complete the International Students degree. As a matter of accommodation, those who have completed 125 units may apply to take the practicum course and may be considered depending on their cumulative general point average.

Enrollment in the practicum program symbolizes that graduation is within reach and employment is in the offing. There is therefore a sense of anticipation and excitement when students embark on this program. Neil Patel (2014), an author of Psychology reveals that people are generally wired to anticipate happy experiences. Positive anticipation directly impacts preparedness and affects output conversion.

In addition, the department through the Practicum Moderator, prepares the students for the program anywhere between 6-8 months through various orientation meetings, motivational talks, and pre-training activities. Given this length of time to prepare and the various activities that lead up to the practicum, by the time the students start the training, they are already mentally, emotionally and physical prepared.

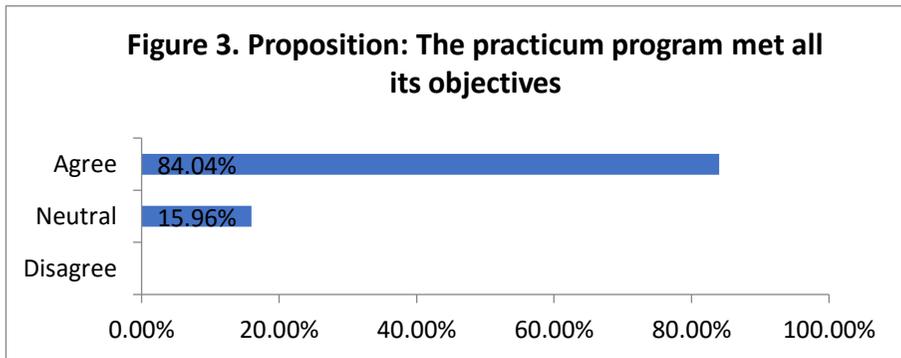
Those that answered neutral were respondents who were not given assignments in front office operations or were not able to be accommodated in their first choice of training company. There was therefore a degree of disappointment and a lesser degree of enthusiasm going into the program.

B. Availability and accessibility of equipment and facilities in host training companies.



The IS department of SBCA ensures that the students take their practicum in reputable companies where they are welcomed and even needed so that they actually have a hands-on experience and perform tasks using the actual equipment and facilities that a newly hired employee might do. This explains why majority of the respondents agree with the proposition. Those that neither agreed nor disagreed were given limited exposure to the front office.

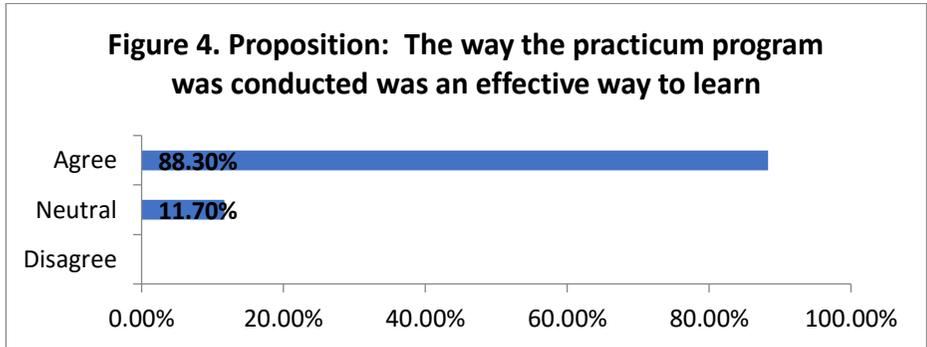
C. Achieving Practicum Objectives



The main aim of the practicum program is to increase the students' employability and develop their personalities so that it would be suited for the industry directly aligned to their specialization. They are therefore expected to be able to experience line functions. The response to this proposition reveals that this is not always the case. To a large extent, the success of the practicum program is dependent on the degree by which the training company is willing to expose them. If they limit their exposure to support functions and their training to clerical practices, then the success of the practicum program on the trainee would not be as much.

In addition, when student trainees pursue careers in industries that they were not trained for in their practicum, in their perception the program did not meet its objectives because they did not acquire the proper skills they now need in their workplace. These cases explain why 15% of the respondents reacted neutrally to the proposition.

D. Practicum as an effective way learning



The choice of host training companies, the preparation undertaken by the students and the suitability of the students to perform actual job functions all contribute to usher more opportunities for learning for the student-trainees. The big majority who responded positively to this proposition perceive the practicum program to be working in their favor. The 12% that were neutral or unsure whether the program is an effective way of learning or not may have assigned to departments where there was little opportunity to acquire new skills.

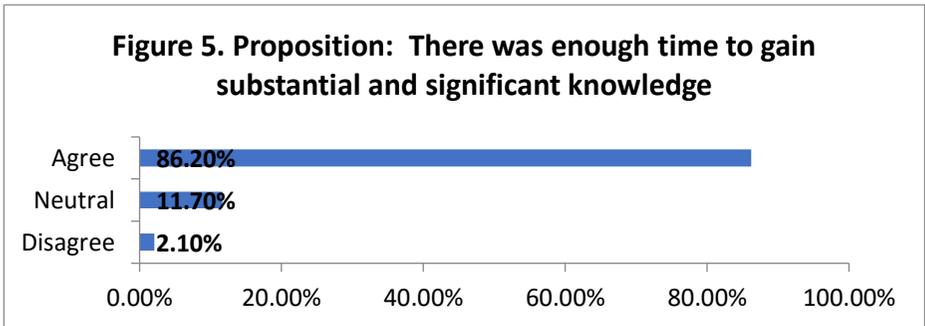
Practicum is considered an experiential course. The University of Tennessee in Knoxville (n.d.) made a study on this strategy and discloses that experiential learning increases students' content knowledge and skills. Statistically, it provides students with higher outcomes in application of coursework than those not engaged in this experience; it results in improved higher-order thinking skills where students demonstrate the ability to understand greater complexities critically increasing students' critical thinking abilities.

Mr Rajiv Jayaraman (2014), Founder and CEO, KNOLSKAPE, posits that experiential learning accelerates learning, provides a safe learning environment for real-life scenarios, bridges the gap between theory and practice, produces demonstrable mindset changes and increases engagement levels for the trainees.

The experiential learning methodology uses critical thinking, problem solving and decision making and has become an established method to accelerate learning. By moving beyond theory to the realm of 'learning by doing,' the trainee, who in this case is in the workplace, gets a first-hand experience of practicing what has been taught. This plays a crucial role in

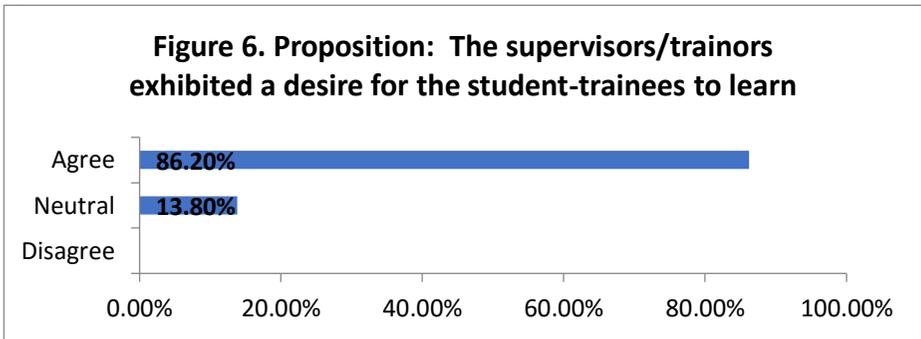
retaining concepts and ideas. Because of the “live” environment, the experiential learning method is impactful on the person’s mindset – whether he strengthens what is existing or whether he has a paradigm shift. On the other hand, the high focus on collaboration and learning from each other benefits the participant as it increases engagement.

E. Four Hundred hours as sufficient time to gain and experience substantial knowledge



The increase of training hours from 200 hours to 400 hours was done precisely so that student-trainees would have sufficient time to gain experience and acquire substantial knowledge. Even as 86% percent agree with SBCA that this is sufficient, the remainder are either unsure (12%) or disagree (2%) with the proposition. The trainees are not able, and are not expected to learn all aspects of travel or hospitality operations in 400 hours – and as trainees (as differentiated from employees), some delicate functions are not taught, hence this explains why the 14% answered the way they did.

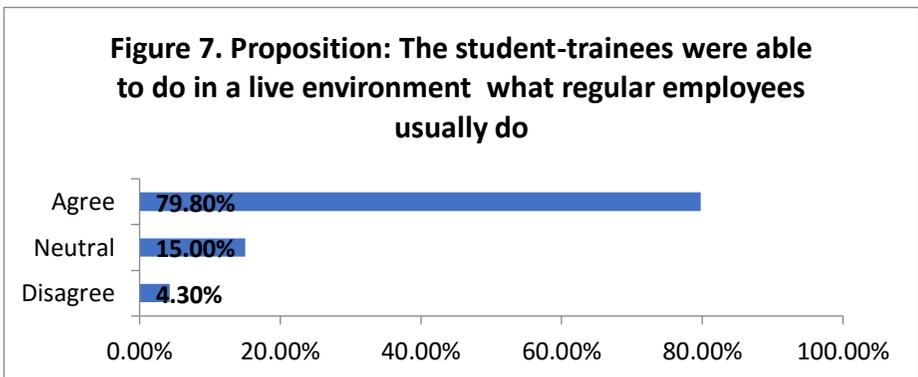
F. Trainor’s desire for trainees to learn



The attitude and mindset of the supervisors assigned to the trainees play a very important role in the learning experience of students. While the clear majority of the respondents felt that their supervisors in their training companies wanted them to learn, the 14% who felt neutral about the proposition bespeaks that some supervisors – or perhaps even some host training companies may have some reservations in training the students. This should be considered and more assertive efforts should be exerted to ensure that the students reap the benefits of the practicum program.

2nd Level of Evaluation: Learning

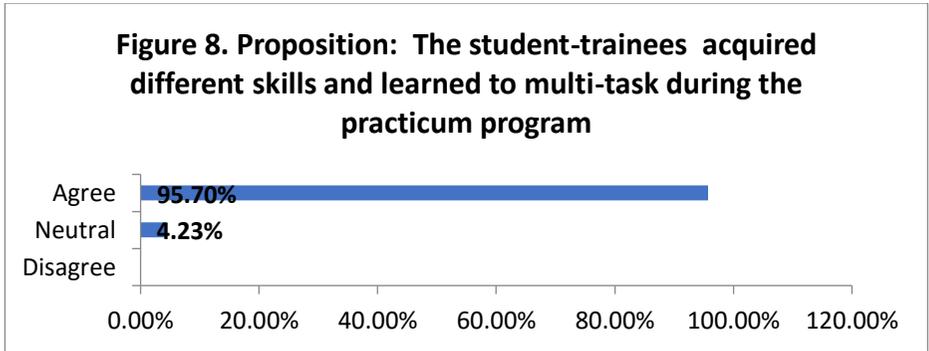
A. Ability to put into practice skills learned



A vast majority of the respondents said that they did learn specific skills unique to the tourism industry in a live environment at their host training company like guest check-in, flight reservations and ground-handling among

others. These are skills and experiences not normally acquired in the classroom and add to the employability of the student. Those that answered neutral and disagreed with the proposition were not assigned to front office departments and hence may have acquired only general office skills instead of specific industry skills.

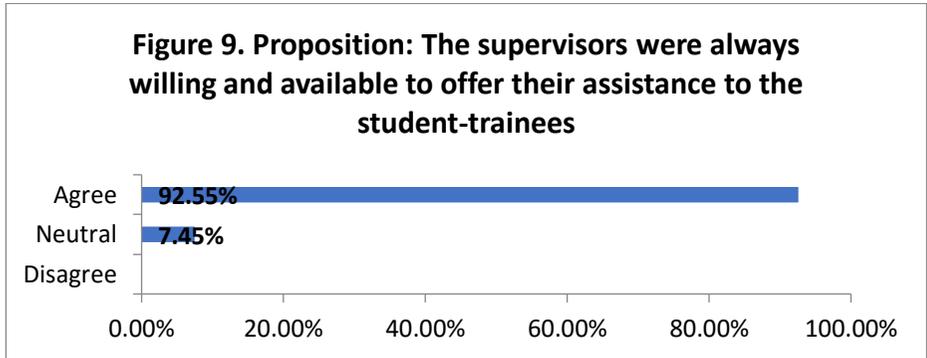
B. Learning multi-skills and ability to multi-task



Except for 4%, all respondents said they learned multi skills and acquired the ability to multi-task regardless of the departments they were detailed in. It must be noted that even as 15% of respondents in the previous proposition were neutral about whether the practicum program met its objectives, there seems a much higher percentage of agreement here – which indicates that even when student-trainees are not assigned to front line operations, they still acquire several skills and learn to multi-task.

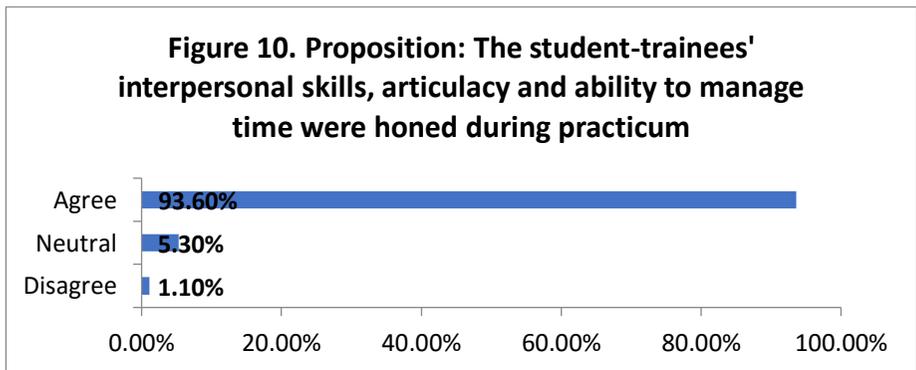
Anyone connected with any niche in the tourism industry – in any department, needs multi skills and needs to multi task since several scenarios are happening simultaneously and in a fast pace.

C. Availability and Accessibility of Training Supervisor



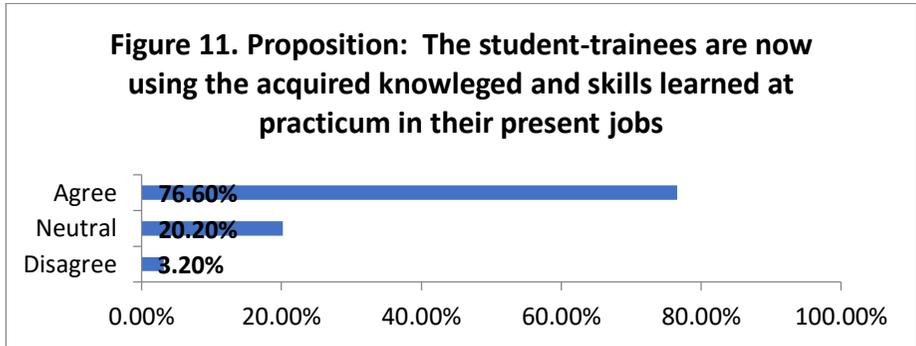
Once again, another overwhelming positive response which indicates that the host training companies are worth retaining since they have accomplished their end of the arrangement. It also indicates a positive relationship between trainee and trainor which is even more reason to continue – if not strengthen the existing relationship between SBICA and these companies.

D. Honing of interpersonal skills, articulatory and time management



The response to this proposition is encouraging as it points to the fact that the practicum program not only equips the student-trainees with technical skills and know-how but also develops other areas of their personalities that are all essential in being a successful professional.

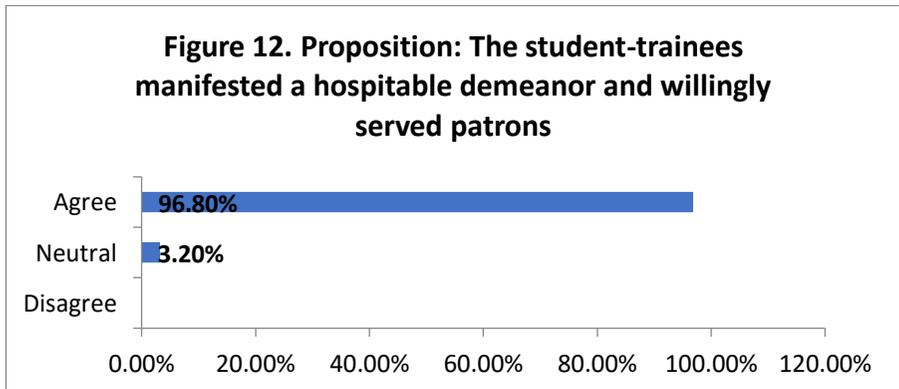
E. Application of knowledge learned in practicum in present jobs



Although a vast majority of the respondents agreed to the proposition that they are now applying the knowledge they learned from the practicum program in their present jobs, the 20% who answered neutral are not able to use their technical know-how in their present jobs due to misalignment of academic specialization and present employment. However, they did not totally answer “disagree” due to the fact that they acknowledge that the evolution of their personalities – their maturing, development of self -confidence and improvement in their communication skills still figure significantly in their present careers.

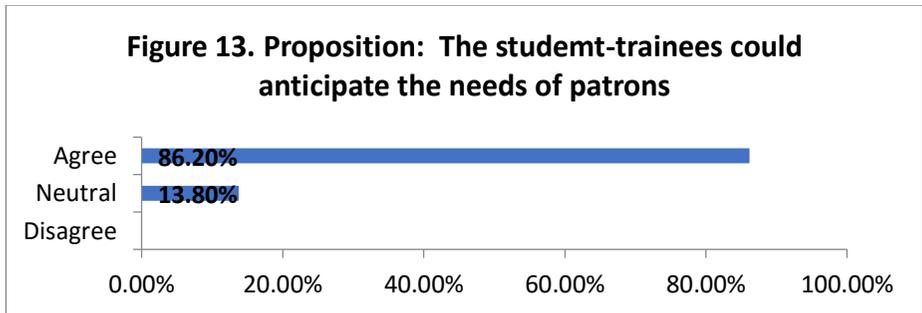
3rd Level of Evaluation: Behavior

A. Hospitality and willingness to serve others



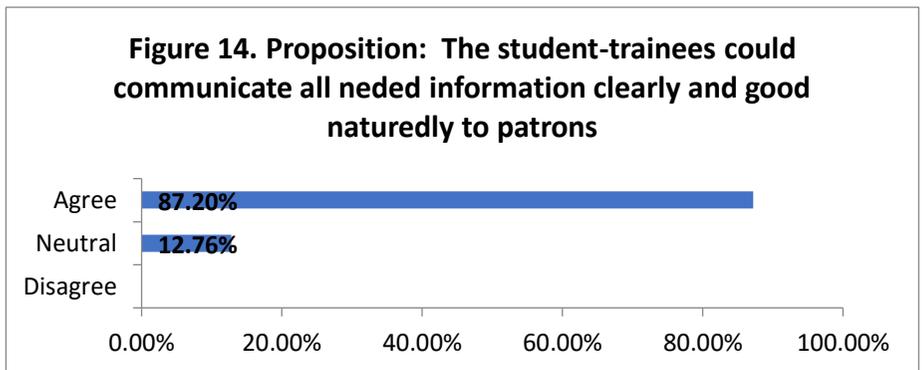
Almost all respondents are in total agreement that their spirit of hospitality and willingness to serve others was enhanced if not developed during the practicum. Once again those that answered neutral had minimal exposure to line and or service functions, hence the opportunity to supplement these traits was limited.

B. Anticipating patron’s needs



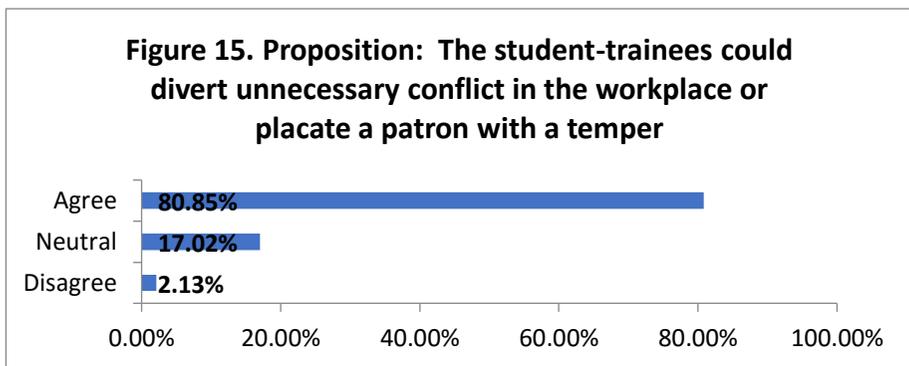
Most student-trainees were given hands-on training and asked to perform tasks like an employee. They could sharpen their instinct to anticipate guests’ needs which is a requirement in a service-oriented industry. Those that reacted neutrally to the proposition had limited opportunities to do actual front line tasks, either because they were not assigned in departments that had direct contact with patrons or that they were not allowed to do so.

C. Communicating information



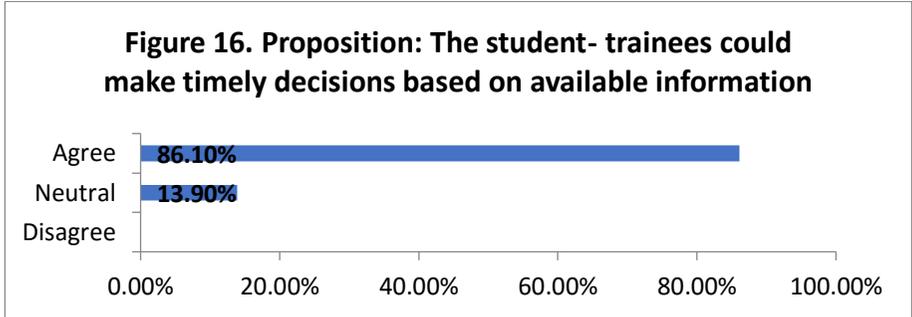
The ability to communicate information clearly and correctly like flight details, gate numbers, boarding details, meal inclusions, check-in and check-out rules, and complementary services is a crucial trait in the tourism industry. Although a very significant number of respondents revealed they had the ability to do this during their training, still 13% were neutral about this. As this is a crucial procedure of any service industry, some training companies opt to be on the safe side by requiring only their regular employees to do these tasks.

D. Diversion of conflict in the workplace and placating guests with a temper



This is one of the few areas where there is a significant number of respondents who answered neutral while a couple of respondents did not agree with the proposition. To be able to divert conflict and placate a guest or passenger with a temper, one must be confident and have some degree of authority – which are traits NOT automatically associated with student-trainees. It is not surprising therefore that about 20% of the respondents opted not to fully agree.

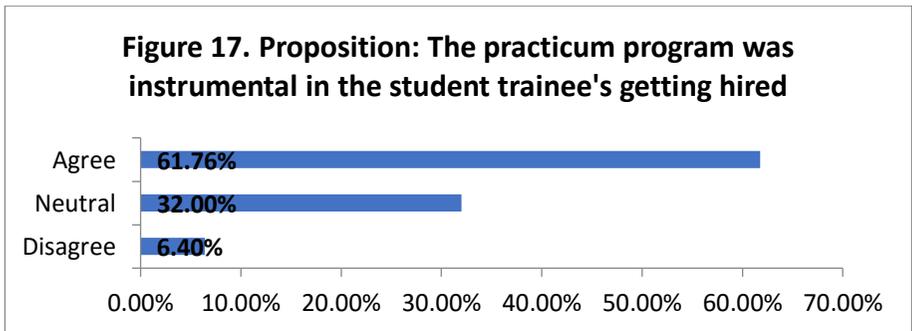
E. Decision Making



Sitting in the frontline of the tourism industry– whether in travel or hospitality, demands that one can make correct decisions instantly given available information. While over 85% agreed that that they exhibited this trait, close to 10% were unsure. Again, one’s ability to manifest this behavior is dependent on his assigned task and the department where he is designated in.

4th Level of Evaluation: Result

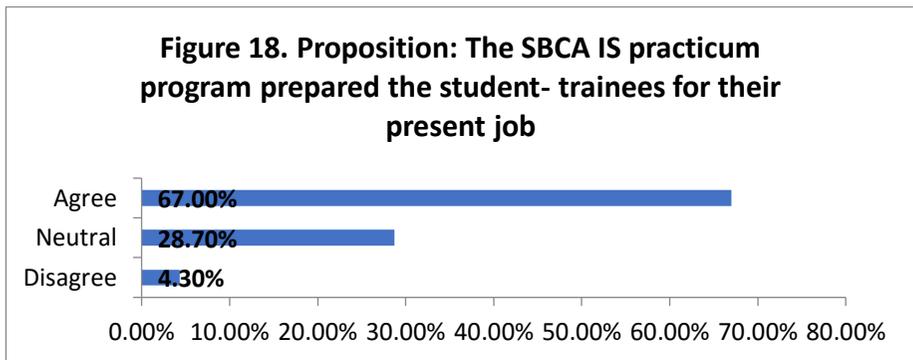
A. The practicum program experience as instrumental in student-trainee’s employment



Although the majority of respondents agree that the practicum program was instrumental in their being hired, 32% are neutral about it and 6% disagree. This of course is not surprising as the decision to hire is dependent on many factors. The 32% who were neutral were unsure whether the employers took their exposure in practicum into consideration. Six percent believe that the program was not instrumental in their hiring in as much as they pursued careers

in different fields, hence they did not perceive the program to be of significance in the decision to employ them. What the respondents fail to consider is that the program – as they claim it did in the previous propositions – contributed to the development of their confidence, articulation and decision making abilities among others. No less than International Labor Organization Director-General Guy Ryder (2014) highlights the role of a practicum program when he says that quality apprenticeship is the gold standard to get youth into decent jobs.

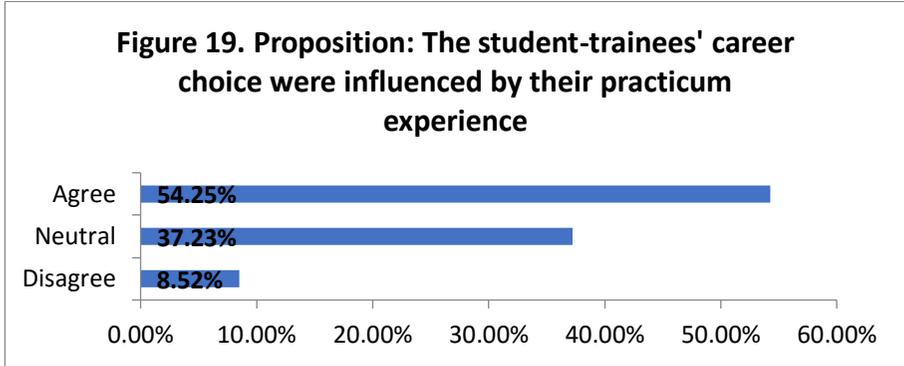
B. The practicum program as a preparation for one's job



The response to this proposition is dependent on whether the respondents ultimately landed in a job of the same nature as his training company. If he did, then he agreed, otherwise, he was neutral or disagreed entirely with the proposition. Again, what the respondents may have not considered were the intangibles – the maturing of the individual, development of self-confidence, enhancement of communication faculties, the improvement in time management skills and the advancement in decision making skills, among others.

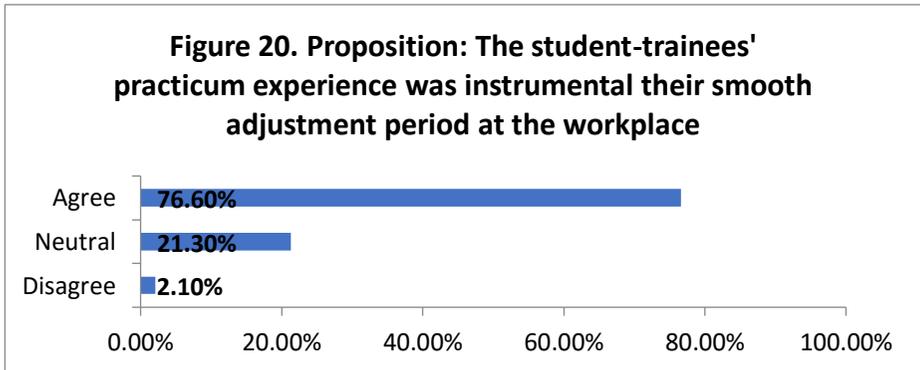
Tim Baker, an author on human resource management puts more value in a program that develops the person rather than a production-centered approach. He says that the latter is one-dimensional whereas personal development stresses an indirect link between the learning experience and work performance. The primary motivation to invest in personal development learning is to enhance an individual's personal qualities that will have a positive impact on their overall-work experience.

C. Influence of the practicum program on career choice



While still a majority agreed on this proposition, this was the area that garnered the least number of responses under “agreed”. The respondents must have failed to make the differentiation between career choice and available career options. The present careers of the respondents today may not always have been their career choices, but, at the time of employment, they were the available career options. It is unclear whether, if made available to them, they would have chosen the same job as that for which they experienced during the practicum program.

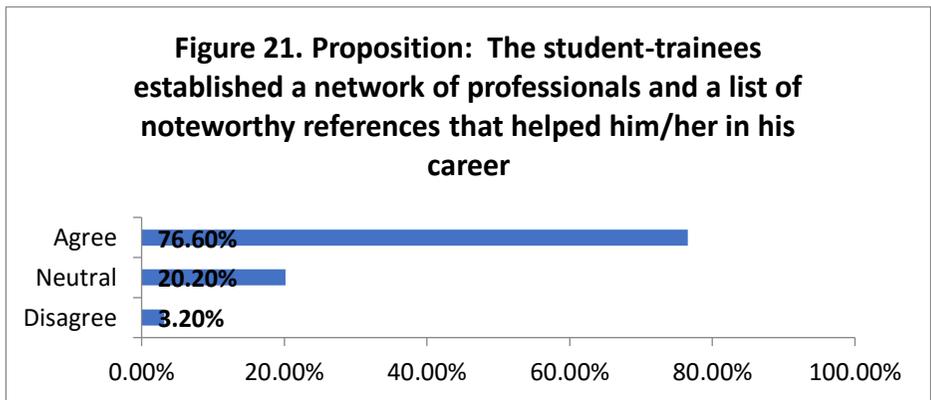
D. The practicum program and its benefits on job adjustments



A high majority of respondents totally agreed that their period of adjustment in their workplaces were smooth and seamless because they already knew what to expect, thanks to their practicum experience. In their post-

practicum meeting, student-trainees often reveal that it is not only the pressure, the pacing and the actual work that their eyes were opened to, but also the dynamics between colleagues – office politics, competition among co-workers and among departments, even intrigues and demolition jobs. The practicum program in a way desensitizes them from the often-harsh realities of the professional world -hence, helps them in their adjustment process.

E. Establishing a network of professionals and a list of references during practicum



It is one thing to validate a student's academic proficiency which mentors from academic institutions usually do for students during the job application process, but as important is to be able to attest to an applicant's proficiency in performing actual job functions. This is the value that supervisors in training institutions provide when recommending a trainee for a job.

Conclusion

In all levels of evaluation, the former student-trainees viewed the IS practicum program positively with majority of the respondents agreeing to the propositions in ALL aspects. The strongest level of the practicum program is its capacity to provide learning and develop the appropriate behaviors needed for the industry. Based on the specific aspect that rated the highest, it could be concluded that the practicum program provided an opportunity to the student-trainees to acquire industry skills that would normally not be learned from the

classroom and also impelled them to manifest a hospitable, good natured, helping caring spirit.

The weakest level is the 4th level: results. While majority of the student-trainees (over 60%) still agree that practicum contributed to their being hired, prepared them for the job and eased their process of adjustment in their present jobs, comparatively more respondents had reservations about their agreement of program's impact on their careers because, rightfully so, many other factors come into play to make the former student-trainees, the industry professionals they are today.

It is therefore recommended that the College of Arts and Sciences continues the alliances with the major host-training companies that the Department of International Studies has at present. A mechanism should also be put into place to match the career plans of the student-trainees with their host companies. A discussion between the host company and a representative from the International Studies department should take place before the placement of the student-trainees to ensure they are to be assigned to front line functions. A written agreement between SBCA and the host training companies should be pursued so that the latter has a blueprint on their role in the development of the student-trainee. This agreement should also explicitly specify that the supervisors or trainers should transfer knowledge and teach skills to the student-trainees. A more thorough evaluation for each student should be made by the head of the practicum program before placement, so that the choice of host company and the nature of work available for trainees is aligned to the academic specialization and career plans of the trainee.

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