

## **Tracing Skills and Personal Aattributes: Employers' Demands from the Communications Graduates**

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### **Abstract**

This study identifies the employers' requirements on the skills and personal attributes of the Communication graduates by analyzing the job advertisements in *SunStar Daily* newspaper, Sunday issues from January 2011 to June 2015 using content analysis. Results show that varied positions with no required experience and with experience are available. Several companies ranging from schools, publishing companies, hotels, car stores, and industrial companies are the prospective employers of these graduates. Moreover, the general communication skills, computer skills, organizational and planning skills, customer service skills, and team skills emerged to be very significant in the industries. Likewise, personal attributes such as individuals who are self-motivated, creative, flexible, and responsible are highly specified. Thus, the results of this study can be used as basis for curriculum evaluation and creation of training needs, and as well as craft a better understanding and compatibility between the industries and the universities producing Communication graduates.

### **Keywords:**

Communication/Mass Communication graduates, skills, personal attributes, job titles, job ads

## Introduction

Schools and Universities are always under pressure to keep the curriculum up to date with the changing demands of the employers. It is a reality that most companies are putting high expectations to their employees in terms of their knowledge and skills. As Salleh et al. (2013) pointed out “Employers nowadays demand that employees be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills for performance and productivity.” So as to meet this demand, these Communication graduates should possess the relevant skills required by their future employers. Thus, this paper endeavors to identify the most common skills sought in several companies for the different positions for the Communication graduates. The research arises from the need to determine the specific skills and personal attributes so as to better comprehend what skills should be focused in the undergraduate curriculum of the Communication majors. Hence, “employees are now expected to be competent not just in their specialized area or field but also in a wider spectrum of skills” (Salleh et al., 2013).

There are more than a few ways which employers post their vacancies like the internet job sites, classified ads in the newspaper or job fairs. This present study investigates the job advertisements in *SunStar Daily* newspaper, specifically the Sunday issues from January 2011 to June 2015. As a matter of fact, Rafaeli and Oliver (1998) aver that “ads are a vehicle for attraction and recruitment of individuals.” Moreover, Giobbe (1995) alluded to in her article that most of the job seekers prefer to read employment ads in a Sunday newspaper. Even if the online job ads are already gaining popularity in this modern age, Barnes (2014) on his part expressed that “Many large employers that have been around a long time are actually more accustomed to posting job ads in the newspaper than they would be posting jobs on a site.”

This research was motivated by the need to better grasp the current and future employers’ needs for the Communication majors. As future graduates in a prestigious university, a lot is expected from this institution to produce workforce that can meet the demands of the employers. Realizing this expectation, there will be now basis in updating the syllabi of the major courses based on the skills highly specified in the job ads.

Secondly, the usual trend carried out in making or revising the syllabi is to depend on the assigned teachers based on their expertise and background knowledge on the specific course.

However, the researcher finds that this usual trend may no longer be practical as there is a gap in the perceptions of employers and the academicians about the skills required from the Communication graduates. This study hopes, therefore that the data such as the job advertisements in *SunStar Daily* newspaper could provide an evidence of the in-demand skills which can guide these teachers in the on-going making and revising of the syllabi of the major Communication courses.

Moreover, “there is a growing demand for greater collaboration between the academe and the practitioners to increase the uptake of research findings and to produce graduates who are equipped with the skills to handle the challenges of the industry (Neale, 2000 cited in Baum, et al., 2009). Up to this time, no study has responded to the above issue to ascertain the skills and the personal attributes of the Communication graduates.

The results of this study would create a basis from which to develop appropriate materials in making sure that the Communication graduates are armed with corresponding skills as a pre-requisite in their workplaces.

In relation with this, a number of studies such as (Du, Stein and Martin, 2007; Kennan, Kecmanovic, Willard and Wilson, 2008; Surakka , 2005; Arcodia and Barker, 2003; Salleh et. al , 2013; and Okamoto and Polger, 2012) employed job advertisements as the main source of data in their research endeavor which has varied focus on the different degree programs of the graduates.

Du, Stein, and Martin (2007) studied on the ‘Content Analysis of an LIS Job Database: A Regional Prototype for a Collaborative Model’. They analyzed the 974 library related advertisements which have been posted since 2000. Results confirmed that the most frequently cited qualifications requested were academic background along with communication, professional, and technological skills. Their study can serve as a guide for the fresh LIS graduates where the results provided empirical data on the skills required in the marketplace.

Another study is done by Kennan, Kecmanovic, Willard and Wilson (2008) where they examined through doing a content analysis of job advertisements that focused on the required

knowledge, skills, and competencies demanded of early career information systems graduates. Jobs appropriate for graduates with three or fewer years in the workforce were investigated. The job advertisement data was gathered in 2006. The analysis indicated a wide variety of job titles. There was a high demand for technical knowledge and competencies, as well as communication skills. A core cluster of IS knowledge and skills emerged which appear to be in demand across a wide variety of jobs.

A study done by Surakka (2005) focused on the trend analysis of job advertisements, specifically the technical skills. He used an American magazine Computerworld to find the most common technical skills sought in job advertisements for software developer positions. Data were collected from every second year from 1990 to 2004. Skills were divided into five categories: programming language skills, operating system skills, networking skills, and distributed technology skills. In these five categories, the increase in distributed technology skills was very strong. In addition, the results about individual skills such as C++, Oracle, Java Server Pages, and TCP/IP are reported.

Arcodia and Barker (2003) studied on the employability prospects of graduates in event management: Using data from job advertisements. To provide an indication of current employer requirements, a nationwide study of web-based job advertisements was conducted. There were 105 job advertisements that analyzed using content analysis. The results reveal the range of industries that require event management specialists or skills, and a series of required skills and key attributes of event managers. Based on the results, a classification of event management skills required by the industries was developed. Also, the results were used as a basis for curriculum evaluation and training needs.

The paper of Salleh et al. (2013) explored and profiled industry-relevant competencies of graduate architects in Malaysia. Content analysis conducted on online job advertisements offering positions for graduates was collected and analyzed to determine the common competencies listed in the recruitment of graduate architects. Competencies are divided into three main components: knowledge, skills and personal traits. Findings revealed a cluster of key competencies deemed necessary by the architectural firms in Malaysia. The results of their study can be used as a guide for architectural graduates towards meeting the employers' expectations. Moreover, the architecture schools can be provided with information in helping

them in reassessing possible competency gaps of their graduates and to realign their curriculum towards meeting the industry requirements.

Okamoto and Polger (2012) examined the prevalence of marketing and promotional responsibilities and qualifications listed in selected academic librarian job advertisements from 2000 to 2010. A total of 149 advertisements from Canadian and American institutions was analyzed using content analysis. The researchers aimed only to position titles containing the terms like "liaison," "outreach," "marketing," "public relations," "communications."

Two main elements of human capital can be discerned from job advertisements - skills and personal attributes. Skills are tangible and measurable and have been referred to as the visible competency component (Spencer and Spencer, 1993 cited in Baum et al., 2009). As Perry et al. (1996) infer, knowledge and skills can be taught and through training and experience can be learned and developed. Personal attributes on the other hand are synonymous with the personal characteristics of an individual. They represent hidden and innate qualities, such as personal attitudes, traits, and values that are more difficult to develop and have been referred to as the invisible competency component (Spencer and Spencer, 1993).

Examples of the skills mentioned in the job descriptions are:

- (a) Organizational and Planning Skill - Descriptions include highly organized, highly developed planning skills, high-level capacity in strategic planning processes, excellent organizational skills, ability in strategically planning events, ability to handle multiple projects, and ability to handle and prioritize tasks in pressure situations to meet deadlines.
- (b) General Communication Skills
- (c) Team Skills - Descriptions include commitment to working collaboratively, working in a team environment or understanding of the importance of a team.
- (d) Customer Service Skills - Descriptions include ability to promote the organization's commitment to customer service both internally and externally, demonstrate commitment to an outstanding level of customer satisfaction, and demonstrate an excellent sales history with a strong customer focus.
- (e) Computer Skills - Descriptions include relevant computer knowledge, strong computer skills, knowledge of, or competence in a specific computer program, web skills, development and management of a website or strong knowledge of computer hardware and software.

These are other examples of personal skills and attributes according to Steward (2000, p. 280)

Personal Skills	Personal Attributes
good communication skills working with others being organized analysis and evaluation	enthusiasm respect for learners caring for learners creativity risk-taking self-confidence flexibility adaptability

Edmund (2000) provided a definition of personal attributes which according to him includes character traits, aptitude, values and attitudes. The examples include the following:

Honesty	Flexible	Logical Reasoner	Sensitivity
Skeptical	Open Minded	Motivated	Curiosity
Organized	Creative	Emotional Stability	

This study aims to identify the employers' requirements on the skills and personal attributes of the Communication graduates by analyzing the job advertisements in *SunStar Daily* newspaper, Sunday issues from January 2011 to June 2015 using content analysis.

1. What job positions are available for Communication graduates?
  - A. Without experience
  - B. With experience
2. What specific skills are required by various employers from the Communication graduates?
3. What descriptions for each specific skill are mentioned?
4. What personal attributes are deemed important by these employers?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed the descriptive method of research. The analysis focused on the different job positions available, the required skills, the specific descriptions of each skill, and the personal attributes mentioned in the job advertisements.

### **Research Data**

Examples of the job advertisements that were analyzed were those that require a bachelor's degree in Communication, Communication Arts or Mass Communication. A local newspaper, *SunStar Daily*, Sunday issues were used to find job titles/positions, the most common skills, the detailed descriptions, and the personal attributes in the job advertisements. Data were collected from January 2011 to June 2015.

### **Research Procedures**

*Gathering of Data.* The study employed purposive sampling procedure. The job ads from the *SunStar Daily* newspaper, Sunday issues were examined. The following criteria were considered: (1) job advertisements which require graduates of Communication, Communication Arts, and Mass Communication; (2) job advertisements which repeatedly publish the same vacant positions for a company will be coded only once; and (3) job advertisements which require no experience will be coded separately from those job ads which require years of experience.

*Treatment of Data.* The data were subjected to Descriptive Statistics. The job ads from the *SunStar Daily* newspaper, Sunday issues were analyzed to answer the first sub-problem in identifying the different job positions/titles for the Communication graduates. To answer the second sub-problem, the skills required by the employers were listed. To answer the third sub-problem, detailed descriptions of each skill were enumerated and lastly, to answer the fourth sub-problem, the personal attributes specified in the job ads were listed. After obtaining information from the job advertisements of several companies, the researcher sent letters in August 2015 asking permission from the employers that an interview would be made to validate the results of the study. After series of follow-ups from August 2015 until October 2015, not a single employer agreed to be interviewed.



**Results and Discussion**

Table 1a  
Job Positions Available  
No Experience Needed

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Ads and Promo Coordinator	Marketing Manager
PR/Media Officer	Public Relations Officer
Curriculum Designer	Special Publications Writer
Content Writer	Marketing Assistant/Officer
English Instructor	Dealer Customers Relations Officer
Account Executive	E-Marketing Specialist
Music School Supervisor	Marketing Associate
Staff Writer	Reporter
Sales Executive	Customer Service Executive
Documentation	Online English Instructor

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Varied positions with no required experience are available for the Communication graduates. Several companies ranging from schools, publishing companies, hotels, car stores, industrial companies, and malls are the prospective employers of these graduates. In an international study that investigated 1,482 students in one of the American business schools concluded that applicants with no experience in a field will more likely to be accepted in known and prestigious companies. The reason behind this is that “larger, more prestigious firms are more comfortable extending offers to those who don’t have much experience because they don’t face too high a cost to replace workers” (Petroni, 2015). His study ascertains that regardless of being fresh graduates, yet a number of employers would employ them. On the other hand, Robillos (2015) suggested that when applicants have no work experience to highlight in their resumes, then, they can accentuate their college internships.

Table 1b Job Positions Available Experience Needed

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Sales Assistant/Marketing Assistant	Documentation Analyst/Proof Reader
Assistant Content Editor	Sales and Marketing Coordinator
Copy Specialist	Graphic Designer
Traffic Executive	Telemarketer
Marketing and Promotions Officer	Account Associate
Sales Representative	Senior Marketing Manager

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Promo/Event Staff	Writer/Journalist	
Program Assistant	Junior Online Editor	
Content Writer	Trade Marketing Assistant	
Faculty	Marketing/Public Relations Manager	
Soft Pages Writer	Corporate Relations Officer	
Web Writer	Content/Copy Writer	
Communications Trainer	Public Relations/Marketing	Reporter
	Communications Head	
Dealership Customer Relations Officer	Advertising Assistant	
Executive Secretary	Marketing and Promotions Assistant	
Training Assistant	External Affairs Specialist	
National Sales Officer	Sales Account Manager	
Marketing Communications Manager	Digital Marketing Officer	
Registration Staff	Assistant Editor	

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This table presents a wide range of job titles for the Communication graduates where their work experience is a basic requirement. In contrast with the positions available for the Communications graduates where no experience is required, still a number of these companies would prefer applicants with previous experiences. One reason cited why most employers have a high inclination on this is because “employees with previous experience don’t need as much guidance and hand-holding as inexperienced workers” (Striber, 2015).

Table 2 Required Skills

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- A. General Communication Skills
  - B. Computer Skills
  - C. Organizational and Planning Skills
  - D. Customer Service Skills
  - E. Team Skills
  - F. Other Important Skills
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Based on the analysis of the job advertisements, various skills have been found and are perceived as essential by the employers to be advanced by the Communications graduates. Since there is a growing demand for greater collaboration between the industries and the academe, these specific skills can hint the latter on the focus of the training needs to help graduates of Bachelor of Arts in Communications handle the challenges of the industries.

These skills itemized in the job advertisements reinforce the need for Communications programs to consider creative ways in developing these skills. The detailed descriptions for each skill are disclosed in the next tables.

Table 3a  
Specific Descriptions of General Communication Skills

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A. General Communication Skills

Excellent in communication skills  
Fluent in speaking and writing English  
Good in both oral and written communication  
Above average communication skills  
Knowledgeable and skilled in English  
Exceptional writing skill  
Excellent oral and written communication skills  
Excels in both written and spoken English  
Highly knowledgeable and skilled in English  
Exceptional written and spoken English  
Good command of English - written and verbal  
Proficient in writing Cebuano and English languages  
Strong background in English grammar and literature  
Above-average reading comprehension skills in English  
Exceptional communication skills in English both verbal and written  
Outstanding communication  
Strong comprehension in English grammar and rules of composition  
Proficiency in English/ Bisaya/Tagalog writing  
Interviewing and writing skills  
Excellent in editing  
Can write business correspondence  
Very good presentation ability

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Different employers are very keen towards the communication skills possessed by the Communication graduates. These firms speak of their applicants' written or oral communication skills. Given that most of the industries are very conscientious on this, they have intensified in their job advertisements the terms such as excellent, above-average, skilled, knowledgeable, proficient, outstanding, and very good. One probable explanation is that it is an accepted assumption that all Communication graduates have already acquired this skill.

Also, a report from Jobstreet pointed out that “when it comes to abilities, companies eye to those who have excellent communication skills” (Robillos, 2015). This finding is also in line

with the results of Kennan et al.'s study (2008) where they recounted that majority of the employers put high value on communication skills (e.g. verbal, speak, write, articulate). Moreover, according to the People Management Association of the Philippines, the lack of effective communication skills is one of the reasons why job seekers are not hired (Rosero, 2012).

Table 3b Specific Descriptions of Computer Skills

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## B. Computer Skills

Computer literate  
Basic knowledge in videography  
Computer literate (knowledgeable in MS Office Applications)  
Proficient in computer applications  
Background in graphic design  
Computer and internet savvy  
Proficient in Microsoft Office and the internet  
Good background in MS Office Applications  
Knowledge in software applications - spreadsheets, word processing, and data base management  
Proficient in MS Office (Word, Excel, and Power point)  
Strong computer skills  
Computer literate (Word for Windows, Excel, Power point and internet savvy)  
Proficient in Adobe Photoshop and creative direction in photo shoot  
Computer and technical skills (MS Office, Photoshop, Pagemaker and Wordpress)  
Proficient in the use of spreadsheet, word processing, presentation, and other softwares  
Proficient in MS Word, Excel, Power point and internet software  
Strong IT skills  
Strong background on all social networking sites and corresponding analytical tool  
Intermediate to advanced skill in Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign  
Literacy in computer operations  
Background in basic office productivity (Excel, Powerpoint, Word)

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Just like the communication skills, job advertisements specifying the need of computer skills is also a requirement by majority of the industries. Some of them explicitly revealed that applicants should be knowledgeable on the following: Adobe Photoshop, Pagemaker, and Illustrator. As a matter of fact, Latzko (2015) observed that applicants who are computer literate “have a better chance of being successful in a workplace” especially if they are “able to navigate computers and use common or specialized computer programs.”

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Table 3c Specific Descriptions of Organizational and Planning Skills

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C. Organizational and Planning Skills

Time management skills  
Keen to details and good organizational skills  
Good organizational, prioritization, and time management skills  
Excellent organizational skill  
Organized and detail-oriented  
Strong background in event coordination and organization  
Highly Organized and detail-oriented  
Organized  
Good in decision-making, problem-solving, and research  
Ability to work under pressure  
Systematic  
Attentive to details

As Communications graduates, one of the required skills by the employers is the organizational and planning skills. Lee (2015) rationalized that “employees with better organizational skills are more productive on the job.” Moreover, she expounded that employees with good organizational skills will be a good evidence proving that they are serious, responsible, and are capable of doing larger tasks. Salleh et al. (2013) explicated that requiring employees to have good time management skills implies that the industries are ensuring “timely completion of assigned tasks and projects within a limited time”.

Table 3d Specific Descriptions of Customer Service Skills

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D. Customer Service Skills

Good interpersonal skills  
Very good negotiation skill  
Effective interpersonal skill  
Customer driven  
Excellent interpersonal skills  
Good people skills  
Outstanding interpersonal skills  
Can communicate well with people from different levels  
Excellent customer service skills  
Strong selling skills and client service orientation  
Excellent negotiation skill

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As Communication graduates, they have to possess with them the ability to deal with different people. Likewise in a survey done in America, 400 employers responded that “people skills are a top priority” for them (Forlaw, 2014). Also, “the demand for interpersonal skills indicated that employers are placing a high value on the ability of employees to work well with others and in groups” (Salleh et al., 2013, p. 6).

Table 3e Specific Descriptions of Team Skills

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E. Team Skills

Team player  
Good team player  
Strong leadership skills  
Excellent leadership skills

Employers as well are seeking for Communications graduates who are able to assume over-all leadership in their workplaces. This confirms Arcodia and Barker’s (2003) reasoning that “leadership style ensures that the team achieves optimum outcomes” (p. 8). Similarly when 400 employers were surveyed in the United States as to the most important skills, teamwork or collaboration cropped up (“Results That Matter: 21st Century Skills and High School Reform”, 2006). Thus, this skill is deemed by the employers as “very important to success at work”.

Table 3f Other Required Skills

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F. Other Important Skills Mentioned

Knowledge in administrative and clerical procedures  
Knowledgeable in publications, TV or radio  
Exceptional knowledge of marketing strategies, concepts, and practices

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The job advertisements posted in SunStar Daily also made mention of very specific skills they need from the Communication graduates. Since these specific skills appear to be requested by the industries, and so will need further attention by the schools and universities which will be relevant in the Communication graduates’ future workplaces. Some of the industries can be very precise on what they aspire from their applicants. Though, the specifics

may vary from one company to the other still schools and universities have to know what these are in order to address the needs of the industries.

Table 4 Personal Attributes

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Enthusiastic	Adaptability
Has dynamic personality	Proactiveness
Hardworking	Innovative
Honest	Creative
Responsible	Passionate
Flexible	Vibrant
Patient	Has warm personality
Humble	Mature
Confident	Results-oriented
Aggressive	Highly motivated
Has an outgoing personality	Artistic
Creative	Highly energetic
Resourceful	Good moral character
Self-disciplined	Eager to be trained
Cooperative	Focused
Has flexible attitude	Strong personality
Self-motivated	Trainable
Deadline-driven person	
Dedicated	
Has initiative	
Efficient	
Has high threshold of tolerance on work pressure and stress	
Can work efficiently with minimum supervision	
Mature with high sense of responsibility	

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In addition to detailing the skills conveyed in the job advertisements, employers also articulate what personal attributes they desire from their potential employees, particularly the Communication graduates. One is that they are looking for individuals who are ‘self-motivated’ where they have this drive or desire to succeed and are also able to motivate a team to achieve certain goals. Moreover, creativity, flexibility, and initiative attributes are also detailed in the job advertisements. Hiring creative individuals denotes the creative needs in their workplaces. The flexibility attribute would infer that there are jobs where rendering over-time is a requirement. According to Marriot (n.y. as cited in “Results That Matter: 21st Century Skills and High School Reform”, 2006) to be successful in the workplaces, it is not just enough that employees are knowledgeable about reading and have good math skills but

should likewise have a flexible personality to enable to adapt to change.

Moreover, the ability to use initiative is also regarded important where the possession of a “forward thinking attitude” matters to employers. Ong (2015) heightened that the willingness to learn and initiate are important traits that employers in the Philippines would want to look for in the applicants.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overall, the job advertisements that were analyzed from the SunStar Daily newspaper corroborate that both skills and personal attributes by the Communication graduates must go hand in hand because these two entail importance to various industries. Accordingly, the results of this study could be used as basis for curriculum evaluation and creation of training needs which will craft a better understanding and compatibility between the industries and the universities.

Further data collection and analysis should be done to ascertain the significance of these results. One is using the web-data which is also a useful tool to get the trends of the different industries’ skills and personal attributes. Ample time should also be given to have a constant dialogue with the employers of the different industries in terms of their needs from the Communication graduates.

Most importantly, so as to bridge the gap between the industries’ needs and what the school or university has offered to the students, the employers should also find time to establish closer partnerships with those institutions, particularly those which are offering Communication programs. Based on observation, the industries do not have a welcoming attitude for surveys and interviews such as this. For this reason, this study recommends that companies should have constant dialogues with schools and universities where they can provide relevant information about the needs of the industries. In this way, educational institutions are able to understand the jobs available for Communication graduates and most importantly, the skills required to achieve success at work.

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