September 2016

# 2016 Tracer Survey of Higher Degree Graduates, Class of 2014

Between May and June 2016, Higher degree graduates from the Class of 2014 were asked to participate in an online survey administered by Qualtrics.

The survey asked graduates about their current employment, previous work experience, further studies, and their personal and professional development. This information will be used for planning and decision making and to gauge UWI's performance in Teaching, Learning and Student Development in the Campus Strategic Plan.

**Profile of Respondents**

Of the total cohort of Higher degree graduates (818), 174 were traced.

| Higher Degree Graduates, Class of 2014 | Number Traced | Response Rate |
|---|---|---|
| 818 | 174 | 21% |

Most of the graduates who responded to the survey obtained a Taught Master's degree (90%). Among the remaining 10% of respondents, 4% earned a Professional Doctorate, 4% earned a Research Doctorate, while 2% earned a Research Master's degree.

Almost half of the respondents studied in the Social Sciences (44.8%), while the remaining respondents were equally distributed in the other faculties. Distributions ranged from 12.6% in Humanities, 12.6% in Science and Technology, to 13.8% in Education and 16.1% in Medical Sciences. There were no respondents from the Institute for Gender and Development Studies.

Respondents to the survey were generally more mature students, concentrated in the 25 to 44 age group (81%). Those aged 24 and under constituted 2% of respondents, while those aged 45 and over represented 17% of respondents.

**Financing Their Education**

The decision to pursue a higher degree is based not only on ability, but on the ability to pay tuition fees. Graduates from the Class of 2014 were asked how they financed their education. Nearly 60% of respondents indicated earnings from employment, followed by commercial loans (41%). Other means of financing their education included financial support from parents (19.5%), financial assistance from employ-

| How financed education | Class of 2014 | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | % |
| Financial support from parents, etc. not to be repaid | 34 | 19.5 |
| Loans from banks and government agencies | 71 | 40.8 |
| Loans from parents or other relatives | 7 | 4.0 |
| Financial assistance from employer | 30 | 17.2 |
| Tuition waivers, fellowships, grants, scholarships | 26 | 14.9 |
| Assistanceships or work study | 7 | 4.0 |
| Earnings from employment | 103 | 59.2 |
| Other | 15 | 8.6 |

Note: Multiple responses allowed. Sample n=174.

er (17.2%), and fellowships, grants and scholarships (14.9%).

For Jamaican nationals, the average amount borrowed to finance their education was $JMD 511,090 and at March

2016, they owed, on average, $JMD 153,768 from the amount borrowed.

**Continuing Education**

The propensity for lifelong learning is an attribute that is valued by the UWI and by nation states for the development of human capital. Graduates from the Class of 2014 were asked about continuing education as it relates to formal and informal learning. While 24% of respondents had taken courses at a college or university after they graduated, a higher percentage of graduates reported participating in self-directed learning. The most common form of self-directed learning was by computer (64.9%), followed by printed material (51.7%) and by family, friends or colleagues (42.5%). Respondents were most interested in learning about computer-related subjects; business and management; and mathematics and foreign languages.

| Have you taught yourself anything…during your free time? | Class of 2014 | |
|---|---|---|
| | Number reporting Yes | % |
| By learning from a family member, friend or colleague. | 74 | 42.5 |
| Using printed material (books, professional magazines) | 90 | 51.7 |
| Using computers (online or offline). | 113 | 64.9 |
| By guided tours of museums, historical, natural, and industrial sites. | 12 | 6.9 |
| By visiting learning centres (including libraries). | 29 | 16.7 |

Note: Sample n=174

**UWI's Influence on Knowledge and Intellectual Abilities**

One of the objectives of the University's Strategic Plan is the development of the ideal graduate. The ideal graduate should be able to think critically, problem solve, communicate effectively, and be innovative, among other characteristics. When asked about the Campus' contribution to their academic development, respondents credited the Campus with helping to develop their skill sets, by considering their development before and after their programme of study.

| Development of Attributes | Before Degree Mean…/4 | After Degree Mean…/4 | Value Increase |
|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence about independent learning. | 2.82 | 3.35 | 0.53 |
| Written communication skills. | 3.01 | 3.26 | 0.25 |
| Oral communication skills. | 2.99 | 3.21 | 0.22 |
| Ability to communicate information effectively and confidently to different audiences. | 2.88 | 3.29 | 0.41 |
| Information technology skills. | 2.74 | 3.02 | 0.28 |
| Capacity for research and enquiry. | 2.67 | 3.25 | 0.58 |
| Critical thinking ability. | 2.94 | 3.26 | 0.32 |
| Ability to think creatively. | 2.91 | 3.20 | 0.29 |
| Problem solving skills. | 2.97 | 3.29 | 0.32 |
| Theoretical understanding of subject areas. | 2.80 | 3.23 | 0.43 |
| Practical understanding of subject areas. | 2.85 | 3.20 | 0.35 |
| Ethical values in human/animal research. | 2.57 | 2.94 | 0.37 |
| Tools to advance innovative ideas. | 2.42 | 2.83 | 0.41 |
| Ability to create successful enterprises for commercial, social, policy or cultural value creation. | 2.12 | 2.54 | 0.42 |

Note: Scale: 1=Not at all developed; 2=Somewhat developed; 3=Mostly developed; 4=Fully developed.

While respondents felt more confident about their thinking, writing, information technology, and communication skills before their programme of study, they were less confident about innovativeness and entrepreneurship. While respondents felt their abilities improved after their degree programme, innovativeness and entrepreneurship remained areas in need of improvement.

**Employment**

While some students are able to juggle employment and studies simultaneously, students are expected to make a transition to the world of work after graduation. The Tracer Survey asked graduates about their employment status at the time of the survey. Of the total respondents (n=174), 78%

reported being employed, while 3% reported being unemployed. Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents did not answer the question.

The main reason for being out of work was being a student (50%), followed by health related reasons (16.7%), other reasons (16.7%) and no answer (16.7%).

Given the age and academic qualifications of graduates, most employed respondents' occupations were classified as professional (54.5%), managerial (15.4%) or technician and associate professional (8.8%). Of the total employed respondents (n=136), 18.4% did not indicate their job title.

Employed respondents were concentrated in the government sector (56.6%), while 22.1% worked in the private sector. The main industries of employment were Education (39.7%), Health and Social Work (14.7%), Public Administration and Defence (10.3%), Transport, Storage and Communications (8.1%), Financial Intermediation (6.6%); and Manufacturing (5.1%).

When expressed in equivalent Jamaican dollars, the median monthly salary before taxes of graduates averaged $195,000. By job location, the median monthly salary was $175,000 for locals, $261,770 for respondents in the wider Caribbean, and $418,519 for respondents outside of the Caribbean. Salaries generally increased with higher levels of education. The median monthly salary for persons with a Taught Master's degree was $185,000 while the salary for persons with a Research Master's degree was $220,333. Respondents with a Professional Doctorate reported a median monthly salary of $416,994. Of note, however, was the median monthly salary of respondents with a Research Doctorate. Their salary was $183,333 which was closer to the salary associated with a Taught Master's degree.

In equivalent $JMD

| Monthly Salary by Job Location | N | Mean $ | Median $ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Local | 77 | 232,752 | 175,000 |
| Regional | 15 | 278,948 | 261,770 |
| International | 7 | 382,275 | 418,519 |
| Total | 99 | 250,323 | 195,000 |

In equivalent $JMD

| Monthly Salary by Degree Programme | N | Mean | Median |
|---|---|---|---|
| Taught Masters | 90 | 240,137 | 185,000 |
| Research Masters | 2 | 220,333 | 220,333 |
| Professional Doctorate | 6 | 421,498 | 416,994 |
| Research Doctorate | 2 | 183,333 | 183,333 |
| Total | 100 | 249,487 | 194,500 |

When asked about their overall satisfaction with their job, 66.9% of employed respondents reported being satisfied. Aspects of their job that were particularly satisfying were contribution to society (77.3% satisfied), job location (75% satisfied), degree of independence (72.1% satisfied), and job security (71.4% satisfied). Areas of less satisfaction were opportunities for advancement (49.2% satisfied), salary (49.3% satisfied), and benefits (52.9% satisfied).

**Satisfaction with Higher Degree Programme**

Higher degree graduates from the Class of 2014 were asked about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their programme of study. These questions were posed towards the end of the survey where non response to these questions was between 26% and 28% of the total sample (n=174).

One question that was asked of graduates was whether the graduate degree was their first choice of study. Close to 60% (56.9%) said yes, while 15.5% said no. When asked about the choice of study, 60.9% of respondents answered "yes, it was just right," while 4.6% answered "no, I should have studied something else." Approximately 8% answered "I do not know."

Among the 4.6% of respondents (n=8) who felt that they should have studied something else, some felt they should have pursued another programme of study such as Higher Education Management (n=1) or a Master's in Business Administration (n=1), while other respondents had issues with the courses. Issues included the programme not being conducive to employment (n=2), the programme not broadening their horizons or skill sets (n=1), the programme not

focussing more on methodology than theory (n=1), and the poor delivery of the course(s) (n=1).

Graduates were also asked about the length of time to find employment in their chosen field. Of the total sample (n=174), 28.2% reported being employed in their chosen field at graduation. Among the remaining respondents, 7.5% found employment in less than one year, while 5.7% of respondents found employment in 1 to 2 years. Approximately 11.5% of respondents were still searching for a job, while 20.7% of respondents answered "not applicable." The remaining respondents (26.4%) did not answer the question.

A final question asked graduates to rate the extent to which their degree programme contributed to certain professional benefits. Respondents were more likely to agree that their degree programme provided recognition for enhanced skills in their organization (51.7% agree). Respondents were less likely to agree that their degree programme contributed to higher income (36.8% agree), higher mobility across jobs (35.7% agree) or higher progression in the same job (35% agree).

**Summary and Conclusion**

The *Tracer Survey of Higher Degree Graduates, Class of 2014*, is the first survey of its kind conducted at the postgraduate level. The findings show that students pursuing a higher degree programme are more likely to fund their education from their own earnings (59.2%) in addition to commercial loans (40.8%) with very few students benefitting from fellowships, grants and scholarships (14.9%). This finding is noteworthy since the Mona Campus is desirous of boosting enrolment in higher degree programmes, especially research ones. Continued effort is required in order to increase fellowship and scholarship opportunities for applicants and prospective applicants in higher degree programmes that may increase enrolment.

The findings also showed that higher degree graduates have a propensity for lifelong learning. Many respondents reported learning on their own using either a computer (64.9%) or printed material (51.7%). Another 42.5% reported learning from a family member, friend or colleague. The most common subject areas of learning were computer-related; business and management related, and mathematics and foreign-language related. This finding bodes well for both the University and the nation state since lifelong learning is indicative of human capital development.

In terms of the Campus' contribution to student learning and development, respondents' ratings of their abilities, before and after their degree programme, reflect increased growth and development from their programme of study. The only areas in need of improvement are *tools to advance innovative ideas* and *ability to create successful enterprises*. These areas will need to be further integrated into the curriculum.

The low propensity for entrepreneurship among our graduates is reflected in the nature of their employment. While 78.2% of respondents reported employment, most are concentrated in the government sector (56.6%) rather than the private sector (22.1%). These professionals and managers work in the fields of Education (39.7%); Health and Social Work (14.7%); and Public Administration and Defence (10.3%) and, to a lesser extent, Transport, Storage and Communications (8.1%); Financial Intermediation (6.6%); and Manufacturing (5.1%). Both the Campus and external stakeholders view the University as a key player in the economic growth and development of the country and region. It is important, therefore, that administrators at the Mona Campus find ways and means of developing this attribute in students through curricular and extracurricular interventions.

Finally, the findings also reveal the value of a higher education. An advanced education not only results in citizens with a propensity for lifelong learning, but also higher salaries for higher levels of education. The median monthly salary of graduates (in equivalent $JMD) was shown to increase with higher levels of education. In addition, where graduates were less satisfied with the salary and benefits of their job, they were appreciative nonetheless of the contribution to society (77.3% satisfied) that their job afforded them.