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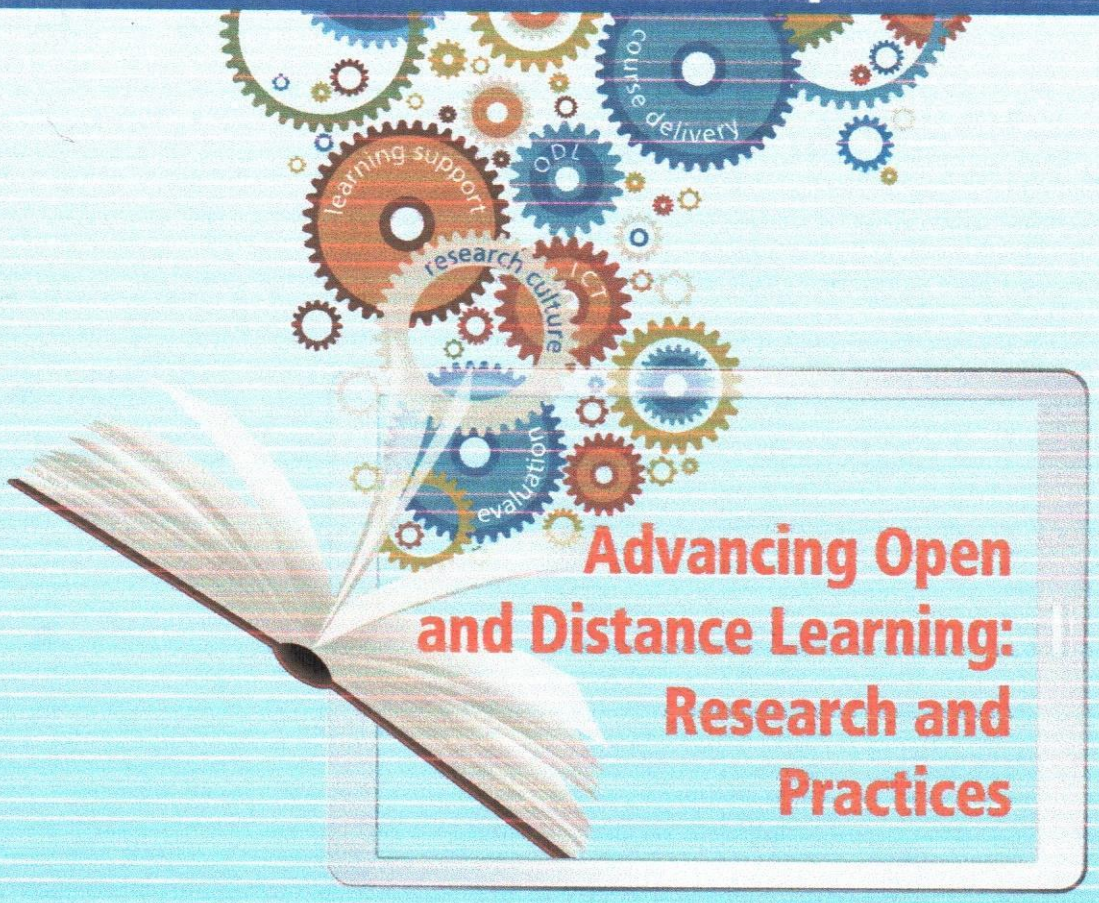

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Danny Wong, K C Li and K S Yuen

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Preface

We are pleased to publish the *Proceedings of the 28th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities* (AAOU 2014).

The theme of the Conference, *Advancing Open and Distance Learning: Research and Practices*, highlights the common goal of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) and its member institutions, which is to facilitate and achieve advancements in open and distance education (ODE) on the solid basis of research findings and through sharing best practices. You will find that the papers of these proceedings serve this goal very well. They report research and share practices under at least one of the following sub-themes:

- Multi-mode education
- Student learning support
- Development of instructional materials
- Staff development
- Studies on OCW and MOOCs
- Institutional advancement and innovations
- Development and adoption of OER
- Blended learning
- Planning and management
- Collaboration between institutions
- Use of ICT in course delivery
- Quality assurance
- Assessment and evaluation
- Funding and infrastructure for research and development
- Nurturing an institutional research culture

From more than 300 submissions, the Conference accepted only 107 full papers through a stringent review process by the International Programme Committee. The papers are representative of the latest studies by administrators, academics and researchers in the field and provide a good overview of the most recent developments in ODE.

We would like to thank all authors for their contributions. We are also grateful to members of the AAOU 2014 Academic Programme Sub-committee and the Secretariat for their diligence in securing a

large number of paper submissions from a broad range of countries and completing the review of these many submissions within a tight schedule. We extend our thanks to staff of the Educational Technology and Publishing Unit of the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK) for their design, administration and production support for these proceedings. We are also obliged to the dedicated staff of the OUHK University Research Centre for their untiring and efficient logistical support in handling the papers. Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for their sponsorship support to many delegates to attend the Conference.

Editors
Danny Wong, K C Li and K S Yuen

October 2014

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An exit survey as baseline data for improving the quality of student learning support

Kristanti Ambar Puspitasari, Benny Agus Pribadi and Sudirah

Universitas Terbuka
Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The quality of service in a higher education institution could be measured by how satisfied the alumni are towards the student learning support that was provided during their study. The alumni are important as they could be potential marketing agents of the university they are graduating from. It is expected that satisfied alumni will be likely to speak proudly about the university they have attended. Universitas Terbuka (UT), as the only higher education in Indonesia—which implements Open and Distance Learning (ODL) —has over 579.261 active students in the second semester of 2013. This massive student body requires a very comprehensive database for both students and alumni as a baseline data to provide appropriate support services. UT has been implementing an exit survey for several years now to update the database of its alumni. The objective of this survey is to gather information on the occupation status, reasons for studying at UT, satisfaction towards student support services provided during enrollment, reasons for selecting their study program and how they learned about UT. This information is useful for improving the quality of student support services provided at UT. This study attempts to analyze the results of UT's exit survey with regard to the potential improvement of student learning support offered to the students.

Keywords: exit survey, alumni, student learning support
Sub Theme: Research and innovative ODL practices

High dropout rate has been associated with Open and Distance Learning (ODL), including in online learning (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Tait, 2014; Tyler-Smith, 2005). Thus, how to retain the students is much more important than how to recruit new students for ODL institutions (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Student support system, consequently, is regarded to be very crucial for student retention in any ODL institution (Dearnly, 2013; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Jung and Hong, 2014; Simpson, 2002). Student support in the forms of student guidance and counseling, support from tutors, and effective information and administrative systems is critical to strengthen the ODL students' self-confidence to continue their study (Tait, 2003). In contrast, conventional universities could manage to have a high rate of student retention probably due to a considerably selective entry scheme in addition to a well-developed and matured student support system and learning infrastructure (Scott, Shah, Grebennikov, Singh, 2008).

However, despite being widely studied in higher education (Tinto and Pusser, 2006), student retention in ODL is much less reported than student dropout in this learning

environment (Baxter, 2012). On the other hand, studying about factors affecting students to stay could help institutions to develop appropriate interventions to prevent students' withdrawal. Studying about students' motivation to enroll in an ODL institution and how satisfied they are towards the services they received could help determine the student support to be provided in order to help them succeed in their study. This study attempts to use the exit surveys' results to learn about the alumni's reasons for choosing to study at Universitas Terbuka (UT) and their satisfaction towards the student support provided by the institution. We studied the alumni as alumni of ODL represent successful students who could deal with the obstacles of learning at a distance.

Exit survey is an assessment method that is commonly conducted in an organization to learn about the perceptions of a group of people who are about to leave the organization. This method is effective to learn directly from employees who are leaving the organization (Giacalone, Jurkiewics, and Knouse, 2003) about what the organization could have done better to maintain the employees. This survey can ask about working conditions, career development opportunities, the quality and quantity of workload, or the relationship with other employees or with the supervisors. It is expected that the separating employees will feel free to express their honest opinion about the organization they are leaving. This survey can help the management to find out whether there are recurring problems mentioned by these departing employees (Mazzei, 2008). The information identified can be used to improve the working conditions contributing to high rate of employee turnover. On the other hand, exit survey can also reveal satisfying conditions that should be reserved by the organization.

Exit survey is also widely utilized in the field of education. At the Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Malaysia, for example, an exit survey was administered to students taking the final course in the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) program in the College of Engineering (Goh, Chau, Baharuddin, and Abidin, 2013). The students were asked about the course and program learning outcomes, the overall satisfaction, the career they were planning, and their recommendations for improving the terminal course. At the University Mindanau in the Republic of the Philipinnes, an exit survey was conducted to evaluate the academic and student services (Tan, Mines, dan Guhao, 2010). The results of the survey indicated that the learning objectives of the program could be achieved by appropriate delivery even though there are some enhancement needed with regard to the expectation and satisfaction of the students. At Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia, exit survey is administered when students are graduating from a program. Graduating students are asked to respond to questions about their job status, reasons for studying at UT, satisfaction during study enrollment, reasons for selecting their study program, and how they learned about UT.

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is a state university in Indonesia that fully implements ODL system. It was established on September 4, 1984 by the Indonesian government. Initially, the ultimate aim of establishing this university was (1) to increase the access to higher education for high school graduates who intended to continue their study and (2) to improve the qualifications of school teachers. The number of first students accepted at UT was more than 60.000 students in 1984. Recently, in the second semester of 2013, UT has around 579.261 active students who enroll in 34 programs of study. The big student body consisted of those enrolled in the primary teacher education (PTE) and in the non primary teacher education programs (NPTE). Almost 80% of the students enrolled in the PTE programs (Elementary Teacher Education and Early-Childhood Education Programs), while the rests are distributed among 32 programs of study. The number of PTE students is enormous as the Government of Indonesia enforced a regulation that every primary school teacher should hold a bachelor degree in primary teacher education (Law No. 14, 2005 on Teacher and Lecturer). Because UT has the capacity to accept a large number of students from all over the country, UT has received the mandate from the Indonesian Government to provide the education for the inservice primary school teachers who haven't attained the required degree. However, many primary school teachers has already met the qualification at present. Accordingly, the number of PTE students at UT is now declining.

The vast decline of PTE student enrollment cannot be compensate by the increase number of NPTE students. In addition, in 2013 the Goverment also give permission for existing programs of study in any higher education institutions to offer dual mode programs of study. Subsequently, UT is not the only institution offering ODL in NPTE programs in Indonesia. As a results, many prospective students may choose to enroll in the ODL programs offered by prominent conventional universities for different reasons. Thus, it is necessary for UT to understand the reasons of the alumni for choosing to study at UT or for continuing their study at UT in the effort to improve the provision of crucial student support systems.

In serving the students, UT provided student support systems both in the Headquarter and in 39 Regional Offices located in 33 provinces of Indonesia, included one Regional Office serving students resided outside the country. The provision of student support consisted of information provision, academic support, and academic administrative support services (Puspitasari and Dimiyati, 2009). In general, the student support provision is intended to (1) facilitate student learning, (2) support students to become independent learners, (3) respond to students' enquiries effectively and efficiently, and (4) address students' complaints and problems accurately and timely (Puspitasari, 2002). Information provision includes providing information for both prospective and registering students. Information requested could cover enquires about UT, academic calendar, registration period, transfer of credits, etc. In the academic area, support service is provided in the form of tutorial and academic counseling. Academic

administrative support usually related with services regarding registration, learning material distribution, examination administration, report of examination results, and commencement or graduation ceremony. In order to ensure the quality of the student support provided by each regional office, UT has implemented quality assurance system that is in accordance with both AAOU (Asian Association of Open Universities) Quality Assurance framework and the standard quality of the National Accredited Body for Higher Education of Indonesia.

With regard to promote continuous improvement, UT administered an exit survey every year since 2010. The data collected was then used by every program study to improve their services to students. For the purpose of this study, data used for the analysis and discussion will be those collected from the alumni of NPTE programs in 2010 and 2013. It is expected that the data resulted from the exit surveys conducted at UT in 2010 and 2013 will be able to be used as the basis for determining the proper or better student support to ensure student retention. It is expected that the results of the data comparison could pinpoint to UT's limitation and tries to offer some improvement or follow up actions that could improve the student support services.

Methodology

The data analyzed for this paper consisted of secondary data resulted from the exit surveys administered to graduates of NPTE in 2010 and 2013. The respondents were graduating students who have studied in various NPTE study programs at UT. Data were collected with two methods: from graduates responded to surveys attached to the announcement of their study completion at all regional centers and from all the graduates at the commencement days conducted at the headquarter office. The data were analyzed to elicit information such as: (1) occupation status, (2) reasons for selecting their study program, (3) satisfaction towards study support, (4) how they learned about UT, and (5) reasons for studying at UT.

Results and Discussion

Occupation Status

The number of NPTE graduates responded to the surveys was 1,199 in 2010 and 1,957 in 2013. The proportion of female respondents was a little bigger in 2013 (59.37%) compared to that in 2010 (51.54%). In 2010, the number of respondents who was working students was 91.82%, while in 2013 the number of working students was only 71.07%. The number of female students who did not work in 2013 was much higher than that in 2010. This might imply that a bigger number of younger female students who do not work enrolled at UT at least in the past few years. In fact, the Rector of UT reported in her 2013 Annual Report that 21.5% of UT active students in 2013 aged less than 25 years old (Rector Annual Report, 2014). With around 29% respondents in 2013 reported as not working; it means that UT needs to provide a variety of information on

career opportunities for them. In addition, the data could also imply that more female feel comfortable to study at a distance compared to male. UT can take advantage of this phenomenon by offering study programs that could interest female. Offering programs that attract female to enroll in higher education can help increase the prospect for women empowering in Indonesia.

Occupation Status	2010						2013					
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Working	559	46.62	542	45.2	1101	91.82	765	39.09	626	31.98	1391	71.07
Not Working	59	4.92	39	3.25	98	8.17	397	20.28	169	8.63	566	28.92
Total	618	51.54	581	48.45	1199	100	1162	59.37	795	40.62	1957	100

Reasons for Studying at Universitas Terbuka

The main reasons for choosing to study at UT stated by the alumni were "knowledge improvement" (25.64% in 2010 and 29.01% in 2013) and "studying while remains working" (25.72% in 2010 and 28.16% in 2013). While "assignment from the office" or "granted scholarship" were the least reasons chosen by the alumni as their reasons for choosing to study at UT. Interestingly, since most alumni were workers, we thought that they might choose to study at UT for career advancement anticipated after attaining the degree. However, only 3.83% respondents chose this reason in 2010 and 4.58% in 2013. It is actually encouraging that many respondents wanted to improve their knowledge or continued their study while still working. This means that they consider higher education as a means to improve their professional development. In addition, it was not surprising that many respondents pointed out that they preferred to study at UT to be able to remain working while studying since most of the alumni already have occupation or profession. Furthermore, only a small percentage of the respondents chose to study at UT just to fill their time (2.05% in 2010 and 3.39% in 2013). These respondents could be alumni who were not working at the time of their study at UT. Nonetheless; it was surprising that they managed to complete their study at UT. It could be interesting to learn their motivation to retain their study at UT. UT could do some entry survey to find out the reasons of new enrollment to study at UT in the effort to improve the support the students might need after enrollment. Online survey should be considered in order to obtain the needed information more timely and efficiently. Moreover, exit survey or a follow up survey could also ask about what their experience after enrollment, whether their need of studying at UT was fulfilled or not, and to state the reasons if not fulfilled. This information could be used to improve the student support much more timely than waiting for the exit survey for the alumni could no longer benefit from the improvement of services that might be implemented.

Reasons for Studying at UT	2010		2013	
	Σ	%	Σ	%
Knowledge improvement	1077	25.64	1311	29.01
No age limitation to register	563	13.40	591	13.07
Advancement in promotion	161	3.83	207	4.58
Studying while remains working	1080	25.72	1273	28.16
Affordable	737	17.55	591	13.07
Motivating family/children	438	10.43	337	7.46
Filling the time	86	2.05	153	3.39
Assignment from the office/Granted scholarship	57	1.36	56	1.24
Total	4199		4519	

Satisfaction towards Student Support Services

In 2010, the alumni considered services on registration (28.83%), examination administration (28.72%), and easy access to information (28.33%) were very satisfactory. While in 2013, alumni were very satisfied with services on examination administration (27.52%), easy access to information (24.54%), and commencement (24.50%). They regarded the service of examination administration very satisfactory. In contrast, the very unsatisfactory services in 2010 were handling of the grade appeal (2.85%), distribution of learning materials (2.81%), and tutorials (2.41%). The 2013 alumni also considered the handling of grade appeal was very unsatisfactory (2.27%). On the other hand, services on learning materials and tutorials seems to have improved in 2013. Therefore, the student support that was consistently regarded as very unsatisfactory was the handling of grade appeal. UT should find out more about what aspects of this support service did not satisfy the alumni, whether it was the procedure to file a complaint, the time needed to complete the process, the end results, the professionalism or the support given by the personnel, etc. Considering that personnel professionalism was not rated highly both in 2010 and in 2013, UT should evaluate the training for the staff in the student support division in their competencies in quality customer service, both for staff in the Headquarter and in the Regional Offices.

Student Support	2010				2013			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
	∑ (%)	∑ (%)	∑ (%)	∑ (%)	∑ (%)	∑ (%)	∑ (%)	∑ (%)
Registration	13 (0.96)	39 (2.88)	913 (67.33)	391 (28.83)	20 (1.13)	93 (5.25)	1295 (73.12)	363 (20.50)
Learning Materials	37 (2.81)	254 (19.29)	891 (67.65)	135 (10.25)	17 (0.97)	299 (16.98)	1202 (68.26)	243 (13.80)
Tutorials	27 (2.41)	138 (12.32)	782 (64.84)	173 (15.45)	20 (1.17)	161 (9.39)	1216 (70.95)	317 (18.49)
Akademic Counseling	18 (1.49)	130 (10.78)	862 (71.48)	196 (16.25)	17 (1.00)	165 (9.66)	1234 (72.25)	292 (17.10)
Examination Administration	9 (0.67)	35 (2.60)	915 (67.98)	387 (28.75)	11 (0.64)	101 (5.85)	1139 (65.99)	475 (27.52)
Handling of Grade Appeal	36 (2.85)	169 (13.36)	832 (65.77)	228 (18.02)	38 (2.27)	241 (14.38)	1096 (65.39)	301 (17.96)
Commencement/ Graduation Ceremony	4 (0.43)	46 (4.97)	671 (72.54)	204 (22.05)	16 (1.10)	100 (6.90)	978 (67.49)	355 (24.50)
Professionalism of Personnel	14 (1.09)	77 (5.99)	951 (74.01)	243 (18.91)	14 (0.85)	123 (7.47)	1186 (72.05)	323 (19.62)
Easy Access to Information	19 (0.17)	95 (7.24)	827 (62.99)	372 (28.33)	19 (1.14)	173 (10.38)	1066 (63.95)	409 (24.54)
Total	177	983	7644	2329	172	1456	10412	3078

Notes:
1= very unsatisfied; 2 = unsatisfied; 3 = satisfied; 4 = very satisfied

Reasons for Choosing a Program of Study

In 2010, around 43 percent of the respondents claimed that they chose their program of study for supporting their work. The second reason frequently pointed out was to improve their knowledge (39.55%). Only a small percentage of respondents in 2010 chose pursuing a degree as their main reason for choosing their program of study (16.65%). In 2013, Almost 50% of the respondents chose their program of study in order to improve their knowledge, followed by the intention to support their work (38.66%). A reason that was pointed out by the smallest number of respondents was to pursue a degree (14.43%). Comparing the data of 2010 and 2013, pursuing a degree was consistently reported as the least reason for deciding a program of study. These results indicated that the alumni regarded improving their professional development as more important than just attaining a degree, which is a very good sign for the development of human capital in Indonesia. Having learned that students were more interested in knowledge improvement, UT must ensure that the learning materials are always up-to-date. Revisions should be based on the discussions with subject matter experts, both academicians and practitioners. Moreover, exit survey could be improved by asking for the alumni suggestions concerning learning outcomes of the courses and programs. Working students' perceptions of what courses to be improved in terms of the intended learning outcomes could enhance the quality and relevance of the study of programs offered.

Reasons for Choosing a Program of Study	2010		2013	
	∑	%	∑	%
Supporting the work	1029	43.81	1045	38.66
Improving their knowledge	929	39.55	1268	46.91
Pursuing a degree	391	16.65	390	14.43
Total	2349	100.00	2703	100.00

Source of Information Introducing UT

In 2010, respondents reported that they decided to enroll at UT after introduced to UT by friends (31.99%), UT alumni (16.84%), or UT students (15.32%). Likewise, in 2013, the main information to introduce about UT was friends (26,38%), family member (14.86%), UT students (11.33%), and UT study group (10.31%). The source of information that was consistently introduced them to UT so they become interested to enroll at UT was friends and UT students. We could guess that the friends who introduced them to UT were somehow associated with UT. Other information which we assumed to be able to reach more people, such as radio, television, brochures, and banner, turn out to be ineffective. In this case, UT is required to continuously improve the service quality to its students so that they could voice their satisfaction to their family members, friends, colleagues. Satisfied alumni could become very good marketing agency. Thus, family member who are a satisfied UT student actually could become a very effective agent to introduce UT to other family members.

Source of Information	2010						2011					
	Female		Male		Total		Female		Male		Total	
	∑	%	∑	%	∑	%	∑	%	∑	%	∑	%
Friends	261	15.20	288	16.78	549	31.99	428	15.70	291	10.67	719	26.38
Magazine	4	0.23	2	0.12	6	0.35	15	0.55	10	0.37	25	0.92
Banner	4	0.23	9	0.52	13	0.76	12	0.44	20	0.73	32	1.17
Radio	1	0.06	3	0.17	4	0.23	5	0.18	0	0	5	0.18
Television	8	0.47	19	1.11	27	1.57	17	0.62	17	0.62	34	1.25
Brochures	15	0.87	29	1.69	44	2.56	40	1.47	39	1.43	79	2.90
Internet	24	1.40	45	2.62	69	4.02	77	2.83	92	3.38	169	6.20
Exhibition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.11	3	0.11
Newspaper	16	0.93	26	1.52	42	2.45	20	0.73	24	0.88	44	1.61
Teacher	18	1.05	12	0.70	30	1.75	71	2.61	39	1.43	110	4.04
Supervisor	40	2.33	35	2.04	75	4.37	52	1.91	56	2.06	108	3.96
UT Student	142	8.28	121	7.05	263	15.32	179	6.57	130	4.77	309	11.33
UT Alumni	140	8.16	149	8.68	289	16.84	150	5.50	112	4.11	262	9.61
UT Study Group	38	2.21	36	2.10	74	4.31	163	5.98	118	4.33	281	10.31
Family member	65	3.79	40	2.33	105	6.12	273	10.01	132	4.84	405	14.86
UT Regional Office	62	3.61	64	3.73	126	7.34	83	3.05	57	2.09	140	5.14
Total	838	48.83	878	51.16	1716	100	1585	58.16	1140	41.83	2725	100

Conclusion

UT has conducted an exit survey every year since 2010. The data was used by each program of study to evaluate the support provided for the students. However, no report has been produced to describe the exit survey results for the benefit of improving overall student support provision. This paper attempts to discuss the ressults of the exit surveys conducted in 2010 and 2013 to compare the recurring data that could identify UT's weak spots and offer some enhancement or follow up actions that could improve UT student support services. With a good number of a younger and non working students attended UT, the institution needs to provide a variety of information on career opportunities for them. UT could offer more programs that may interest female students as the number of female, non working students seemed to be increased in recent years. UT could do some follow up survey to learn their motivation to retain their study at UT, what satisfy their needs after enrollment and what expectations are not fulfilled. As the handling of grade appeal was mentioned to be the reccuring unsatisfactory service, an evaluation should be conducted to determine the weakness of the system to improve the quality customer service in this area. Afterall, satisfied students are an effective source of information to introduce UT to the community, especially to family members, friends, and colleagues. Finally, the exit survey should add some questions to elicit information on what courses to be improved in terms of the intended learning outcomes. This information could enhance the quality and relevance of the study of programs offered.

The information of the exit survey could be more meaningful by improving the instrument. Survey could be an effective and efficient way of collecting information provided it is carefully designed. Therefore, the instrument used for the exit survey should be reviewed by involving faculty members as the main users of the data to ensure that it could elicit information needed by programs of study. Finally, the study could be much improved if raw data could be retrieved in order to conduct more sophisticated methods of analysis to better understand the alumni characteristics and expectations in relation to their achievement.

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