



## Experiences of BA Sociology Students from a Philippine State University: Recruitment, Retention, and Future Aspirations

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# Experiences of BA Sociology Students from a Philippine State University: Recruitment, Retention, and Future Aspirations

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## ABSTRACT

Sociology as an undergraduate program in the Philippines has expanded significantly. A total of 49 higher educational institutions offer an undergraduate degree in Sociology; 20 of which are in Luzon and 8 are in Metro Manila. Despite this growth, Sociology departments face challenges in recruiting and retaining students amidst a competitive academic landscape. This study was conducted with students from a Philippine state university, exploring their motivations for enrolling, reasons for staying, perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, and their post-graduation plans. The insights gained from this research could guide future improvements to Sociology programs to better meet the needs and aspirations of students.

**Keywords:** *Sociology, Education, Philippines, Law School, University*

## INTRODUCTION

Sociology as an undergraduate degree program has made significant strides in recent years. According to the database of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), there are 1,293 higher educational institutions in the major Philippine Island of Luzon. Out of these, 327 are located in the National Capital Region (NCR). Among these 327 HEIs in the NCR, 18 are classified as Local Universities and Colleges (LUC), 4 are classified as Special Government Schools (or OGS – Other Government Schools), 16 are classified as State Universities and Colleges (SUC), and the rest are private institutions. In 2023, CHED held a meeting involving the Sociology faculty and administrators from different HEIs in Luzon. During the meeting, the CHED Technical Panel for Sociology reported that 49 HEIs in the Philippines offer an undergraduate Sociology program in the Philippines. Out of these 49 institutions, 27 are state-owned and the 22 remaining are private schools. The data from the CHED Technical Panel for Sociology also indicate that 20 of these 49 institutions are in Luzon – 8 of which are in Metro Manila.

Despite the increasing number of universities that offer a BA Sociology program, a common challenge remains in many Sociology departments: as the number of degree programs to choose from increases, how do Sociology programs recruit and retain major students? What kind of futures do these recruited students see with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology? Using the students of a BA Sociology program from a Philippine state university as subjects, this study sought to answer the following questions that might inform future adaptations or modifications for BA Sociology programs:

1. What are the reasons of students for choosing to enroll under the BA Sociology program and what are the reasons of those who considered shifting into another degree program?
2. What are the reasons of students for choosing to stay under the BA Sociology program?
3. What are the students' perceived strengths and weaknesses of the BA Sociology program?
4. What are the plans of students after graduating from the BA Sociology program?

## RESEARCH METHODS

The data and the consequent insights from this study were obtained through a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques wherewith the former forms the core of the study while the latter was used to provide a better understanding of the quantitative results.

The quantitative data of the study were obtained from a survey of sophomore BA Sociology students from a Philippine state university. Sophomore students – herein operationally defined as students who have finished two semesters in the BA Sociology program – were invited to participate in the study during the start of the first semester of Academic Year 2023-2024. Among the population of BA Sociology students, sophomores present an advantageous subgroup for the study. This is because the first semester of sophomore year is the most likely time for undergraduate students to decide to leave the degree program that they are initially enrolled in. Students are already given the opportunity to experience the introductory courses of a degree program in the first two semesters of study. This allows students to gauge whether the demands and subject matter of the degree program are within their capabilities and interests. A logical consequence of this is that the sophomore year is the most efficient temporal window for shifting into another degree program. This is because students at this stage in their undergraduate education have only taken a few major courses

in their initial degree program and would, therefore, waste a lesser number of uncreditable units should they decide to shift to another degree program. Related to this is also the fact that shifting during the first semester of one's second year of undergraduate study enables the student to reduce the number of semesters that they will be extended from graduating from college, thereby reducing the opportunity cost of shifting. Finally, the university rules require students to spend two semesters in their initial degree program before being allowed to shift to another degree program. This means that the first semester of the second year of undergraduate education is the earliest at which students can initiate the shifting process. Indeed, in the population under study, this batch of BA Sociology students had a total population of 101 during their first year in college. By the time they reached the first semester of their second year, their numbers had been reduced to 81 – a decrease of 20%.

The remaining 81 BA Sociology sophomore students were invited to participate in an online survey facilitated through Google Forms. The survey involved a combination of closed- and open-ended questions that asked respondents about their motivations for enrolling in the program, and their thoughts on various aspects related to the program. Prior to being given the questions, the nature of the study was explained to the respondents. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that they may opt to withdraw from the survey if they wish to do so. As well, they were informed that their participation would be anonymous, and that no reward would be given in exchange for their participation in the online survey. Of the 81 BA Sociology sophomore students, 49 (or 60% of the population) completed the survey.

Descriptive statistics were deemed sufficient to answer the research questions of the study. To implement the frequency counts for the open-ended questions, the qualitative answers of the respondents were first thematically analyzed. Tabular summaries were made to facilitate easier analysis of the results. The interpretation of the results was done by the two authors of the study. Both authors hold Bachelor's and Master of Arts degrees in Sociology and underwent their undergraduate and graduate education in Philippine universities. The two authors have also taught undergraduate courses in Sociology in a cumulative total of seven different universities in the Philippines offering a BA Sociology degree program - the first author has taught in five universities with BA Sociology programs for a span of 13 years, whereas the second author has taught in three universities for a span of seven years. Both authors serve as faculty members in the university under study. These backgrounds provide them with the capability to look at the results with a combination of etic and emic perspectives. Discussions with BA Sociology faculty and students as well as observations during enrolment and formal classes of the BA Sociology program were also utilized as qualitative aids in the better understanding of the findings of this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. What are the reasons of students for choosing to enroll under the BA Sociology program and what are the reasons of those who considered shifting into another degree program?

When the respondents were surveyed for their reasons for enrolling in the BA Sociology program during their first year in college, they gave various reasons summarized in Table 1. The most common reason given was that they had to settle with a BA in Sociology because they failed to qualify for their first-choice degree program (20%). In the university under study, the BA Sociology program is often given as the alternative for students who wish to take advantage of the affordability of a state university but are unable to meet the required grades of their initial choice of a degree program. A common commentary expressed among Sociology departments in the country is the high number of students who shift into another degree program after a few semesters under a BA Sociology program. Based on the authors' experiences (who have been part of a cumulative total of seven different Philippine universities offering a BA Sociology program), the high mortality rate is often a result of Sociology being a relatively obscure discipline—a situation noted by sociologists from different parts of the world. In his book, *Invitation to Sociology*, sociologist Peter Berger (1966) noted how Sociology as a discipline pales in comparison to other social and behavioral sciences in terms of popularity, most notably when compared to its disciplinary “cousin” Psychology. Indeed, the data in Table 1 indicates that a sizable number of respondents (10%) chose Sociology because it is the closest they could enroll in that is similar to their preferred choice, Psychology.

It is also worth noting that social and behavioral sciences also generally pale in comparison with the so-called “hard sciences” in terms of prestige and consequent institutional support – a circumstance problematized by scholars such as Diamond (1987). This results in the discipline of Sociology having little to no niche market for its graduates. Consequently, there is less demand for slots in a BA Sociology program compared to many other courses available to undergraduate students. Perhaps, as a result of this situation, BA Sociology as a degree program tends to be a non-priority course with a low-grade requirement. These circumstances have given students the perception that enrolling in a BA Sociology program can be used as a “stepping stone” or “backdoor” for those whose grades did not manage to clinch the requirement of their initial choice of degree program. These findings are often an echoed sentiment among casual conversations between students and professors. They are also similar to the observation made by Nelson and Quintos (2013) when they made a similar survey among BA Sociology students of the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

In relation to the aforementioned situation of Sociology as a discipline, it is worth noting that the researchers' observations and informal interviews with freshmen applicants of the university yielded some interesting additional insights: when freshman applicants were

interviewed about their preferred degree program and the reasons behind these preferences, the three following circumstances became clear:

- 1) *Freshman applicants want to get into a program that studies human experiences and immediately assume that this is under the purview of Psychology.* It became noticeable during interviews with freshman applicants that one of the most common considerations they have when applying for a social or behavioral science degree is that they want to study human beings like themselves to understand their own experiences. Examples of circumstances in their lives that the applicants wished to understand are family problems that lead to conflicts and relationship problems with friends and romantic interests – interpersonal problems that are clearly also under the purview of Sociology but often attributed to the more popular discipline of Psychology. What is important to note here is that the students do not seem to have a good grasp on how each degree program is delineated from the other, and in the absence of clear information on the matter, the tendency is simply to assume that these concerns are covered by the most well-known degree program. The overall efficacy of the senior high school curriculum when it comes to introducing the different social and behavioral sciences and the purpose or scope of each may, therefore, need to be revisited.
- 2) *Freshman applicants see more advantages in applying for the BS Psychology program because it is covered by a potential scholarship.* There appears to be a common theme among students wherein great weight is given to economic considerations. It was observed during interviews with freshman applicants that one of their primary considerations in choosing a degree program is whether there is a scholarship opportunity available to the program that can alleviate the economic burden of their undergraduate education. It became apparent during the observation of freshman applicants that one of the reasons students choose another program like BS Psychology over Sociology, despite a general interest in the study of human beings is that the former can offer a scholarship opportunity through the Department of Science and Technology. In contrast, the latter program cannot offer a similar opportunity. A study of BA Sociology graduating students from the same university also showed this pragmatic element in the decision-making process of their respondents (Quintos & Iwayama, 2024).
- 3) *There is a continuing perception that Sociology is the go-to program for those rejected from their first choice.* Back in the 1980s, Bautista (1987) lamented how Sociology programs have been treated essentially as “*dumping ground for students who do not make the grade in other courses.*” During the freshmen application process, many students were observed to sign up under Sociology

only after being rejected by other degree programs. One applicant even innocently expressed, “*ito po ba yung papasukan muna kapag may balak magshift sa Psych?*” (Is this where we are supposed to sign up if we plan to eventually shift to Psychology?). Some faculty members of other departments have even been observed to suggest Sociology to applicants that they have decided to reject from their program.

While the treatment of Sociology as a second choice of a degree program and its obscurity is a disappointing decades-old issue, the second most prevalent reason given by the students provides a promising opportunity for the program’s future. Almost a fifth (16%) of the respondents reported that they became familiar with and interested in Sociology because of lessons related to the discipline from their HUMSS subjects during their senior high school education. The respondents often point to an SHS subject – *Understanding Culture, Society, and Politics* (UCSP) – as their introduction to Sociology as a discipline. The respondents mentioned that they were inspired to take Sociology because they had good lessons in UCSP and their teacher in the course was very good at explaining Sociology to them. To this end, the implementation of the K-12 curriculum can be said to have provided a latent function for the discipline. Before the K-12 curriculum, the exposure of typical Filipino students to the social sciences prior to college education is limited to “Social Studies” subjects. These social studies subjects tend to be approached purely as history subjects except for the final year of high school where the subject becomes a course on basic economics. Sociology, and its fellow social science, Anthropology, are only encountered during undergraduate education. Political science and Psychology, though also not reflected often in basic education, have enough media mileage outside of formal education that they remain known to Filipino students.

Another notable finding from Table 1 is the presence of other influences: books, films, and YouTube videos. The respondents identified a specific book that inspired them to take up Sociology: Mitch Albom’s *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Written in 1997, the bestselling book centered on the author and his old Sociology Professor, Morrie Schwartz, and how the latter spent his last days giving the former lessons on life. The success of the book later inspired a 1999 film to be produced and released as an adaptation. Both as a book and a film, *Tuesdays with Morrie* provided a very positive representation of a sociologist which evidently made an impact on the life choices of some respondents. Beyond the book and film, some respondents also mentioned being influenced by YouTube videos that include sociological content. While these sources of influence yielded minimal weight in the survey (cumulatively, they accounted for only 4% of the reasons for choosing BA Sociology as a degree program), the potential of these forms of media as tools to make Sociology better known to its potential studentry should not be taken lightly. This is especially the case in online social media that have such a ubiquitous presence in the lives of young Filipinos such as YouTube and TikTok.

According to reports (Clapano, 2023), the prevalence of internet use in the Philippines as of 2023 is such that 83% of Filipinos are internet users with more than 10 hours of daily exposure. The reports further indicated that almost all of these Filipino internet users are social media users. A 2022 report (Baclig, 2022) indicated that Filipinos spend around four hours each day on social media. Aside from browsing and interacting on social media, 70.6% of Filipino internet users reportedly watch online videos as a source of learning (e.g. how-to, tutorial, and educational videos) and 21.9% listen to podcasts every week.

**Table 1**

*Reasons provided by students for choosing Bachelor of Arts in Sociology as their choice of degree program*

| <b>Reasons for respondents' choice of BA Sociology</b>                                                                 | <b>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Respondent did not qualify for other degree programs that they prefer more</i>                                      | 20       |
| <i>BA Sociology is related to lessons discussed in HUMSS subjects during respondent's senior high school education</i> | 16       |
| <i>Curiosity</i>                                                                                                       | 14       |
| <i>BA Sociology is similar with Psychology</i>                                                                         | 10       |
| <i>Because respondent wants to "understand how and why individuals acts"</i>                                           | 6        |
| <i>Choice of degree program was an impulsive decision</i>                                                              | 6        |
| <i>Recommended by former teachers and/or friends</i>                                                                   | 6        |
| <i>Because respondent is interested in "human interactions and experiences"</i>                                        | 4        |
| <i>BA Sociology was perceived as best fit for respondent's skillset</i>                                                | 4        |
| <i>BA Sociology was perceived as a pre-law course</i>                                                                  | 4        |
| <i>Respondent was willing to take any degree program as long as it is free</i>                                         | 4        |
| <i>BA Sociology is related to Journalism</i>                                                                           | 2        |
| <i>BA Sociology is related to public service</i>                                                                       | 2        |
| <i>Influenced by the book and film: Tuesdays with Morrie</i>                                                           | 2        |
| <i>Influenced by YouTube videos</i>                                                                                    | 2        |

The respondents were also asked whether they considered shifting into another degree program after two years of study under the BA Sociology program. The data for the study indicate that 70% of the respondents answered positively to this query. Out of this subgroup of respondents who considered shifting into another degree program, more than half (53%) indicated that they strongly considered the idea of shifting but never tried. The rest said that the idea crossed their mind but they never seriously thought about it. Nobody said that they

actually tried. Again, this last information might be a limitation in the execution of the study wherein those who actually tried (and succeeded in their intentions to shift) are no longer included in the population under study. To follow-up on this line of inquiry, the respondents were asked what degree program they considered shifting into after their two semesters in the BA Sociology program. Table 2 summarizes the results.

True to the earlier discussions, around a third of the respondents (36%) had Psychology as their preferred degree program to shift into. A lesser, albeit still noteworthy, proportion of students (18%) preferred to shift to the Political Science degree program instead. As previously mentioned, these two degree programs are often the known social science programs among Filipinos given the relatively high exposure that psychologists and political scientists are provided with in mainstream media.

**Table 2**

*Preferred degree program of respondents who considered shifting into another degree program after spending two semesters in Bachelor of Arts in Sociology (n=34)*

| Considered Degree Program                     | %  |
|-----------------------------------------------|----|
| Psychology                                    | 36 |
| Political Science                             | 18 |
| Secondary Education (Major in Social Studies) | 6  |
| Broadcasting                                  | 6  |
| Philosophy                                    | 3  |
| Architecture                                  | 3  |
| Linguistics                                   | 3  |
| Performing Arts                               | 3  |
| Biology                                       | 3  |
| Computer Science                              | 3  |
| Business Administration                       | 3  |
| Forensic Science                              | 3  |
| Media Arts                                    | 3  |
| Tourism                                       | 3  |

The study inquired further into the reason why some students of the program still considered shifting despite already having spent two semesters in BA Sociology. The results of this part of the inquiry are summarized in Table 3.

The data in Table 3 shows that even after two semesters of training under the BA Sociology degree program, almost half (48%) of those who reported wishing to shift still wish to apply for inclusion in their first choice of degree program (which, as Table 2 shows, is most likely Psychology). The two next prevalent reasons for wanting to shift are also worth noting because they point to important issues about the BA Sociology program that needs to be addressed:

Roughly a quarter of the respondents (24%) expressed that they lack an interest in BA Sociology after having spent two semesters in the program. At first glance, this lack of interest may be dismissed as a logical consequence of not preferring Sociology as their degree program during their freshmen year. We posit, however, that even if the students did not prefer Sociology but essentially found themselves having to train under the program for a year and found themselves still uninterested afterwards, there might also be problems with the delivery of the Sociology program. In previous studies, it has been observed that students point to the discipline's various concepts and theories as one of the primary strengths of the program which the students found to be very interesting (Spalter-Roth et al., 2012). In the case of the respondents of the study, it has been found that they have minimal opportunity to be exposed to this wealth of sociological concepts and theories. An analysis of the Sociology program under the study's curricular map showed that the only major Sociology course the students are likely to encounter in their first two semesters under the program is General Sociology – an introductory course. A similar problem has been encountered in a previous study among BA Sociology students from another Philippine university. In Quintos and Iwayama (2018), it was noted that one of the issues with the delivery of the Sociology program is that the first year of training does not offer in-depth exposure to Sociology. The authors noted that students found it hard to appreciate the program during their freshman (and even sophomore) year, and this led to students deciding to leave the program in favor of other degree offerings that are perceived to be more attractive. The authors found from focus group discussions with BA Sociology students that,

... the participants often blame the curriculum's structure as one of the reasons why there is a high number of BA Sociology students who shift away from the program after their first year. According to the participants, one of the reasons why their fellow students shift is because they do not find the degree meaningful even after a year of Sociological training. This is because they find the major courses in the curriculum which must be taken in their first year are very limited... [the introductory course on Sociology] only provides a general outline of what Sociology as a discipline is, but is usually perceived to be incapable of establishing how distinct and important the program is as compared to other disciplines. (p.6)

One in every five respondents (21%), meanwhile, expressed concern about the lack of job prospects that can be obtained from a BA Sociology degree. The anxiety among Sociology majors and their job prospects after graduating has been a decades-long concern for the discipline. Kim et al. (1998) noted that concerns over the “often dismal” job prospects of Sociology graduates have a long history that can be traced as far back as more than half a century ago. Even in their own research, Kim et al. admitted that there is some truth to the concern that “*Sociology is on the skids*,” albeit having noted that much of this concern is grounded on a long-standing practice wherein Sociology graduates focus on two related fields: academia and research. While Sociology graduates do not pale in terms of skills, these fields tend to employ a limited number of personnel and there is always a threat of oversupply of graduates, especially since these are also fields open to graduates of other degree programs.

More recent reports paint a brighter prospect for the discipline. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), employment opportunities for Sociology graduates are expected to grow by 5% from 2022 to 2032 – a growth which they noted to be faster than the average. In terms of salaries in the United States, Senter and Spalter-Roth (2020) conducted a 10-year comparison of salaries of Sociology graduates with graduates from other fields similar to Sociology (e.g. Business Administration/Management and Operations, Economics, Communication and Media Studies, Political Science and Government, International/Global Studies, Philosophy, English Language and Literature, Psychology, History, Anthropology, and Ethnic/Cultural Minority/Gender/Group Studies) and found that the salaries received by Sociology graduates underwent a gradual increase over the 10-year period and that “[s]alaries of Sociology majors are, in each case, in the middle of the pack. They are always near the middle, neither the highest paid majors nor the lowest paid.” In terms of the variety of job prospects, Senter et al. (2015) found, through a survey of Sociology graduates from 160 different US colleges and universities, that many of the respondents saw themselves involved in a variety of professions outside of teaching and research (which only accounted for 17% of the respondents) after graduation: social services and counseling (21.9%), admin support and clerical roles (16.7%), sales and marketing (12.6%), service industry (9.3%), management (7.7%), and other professions such as programming, information technology, and public relations (8.9%). In Asian countries like China and India, degrees such as Sociology are reportedly experiencing an increase in enrolment because they are seen as stepping stones to public sector employment – which people from these countries perceive as a more secure source of employment than private organizations (Huang, 2024). In the Philippines, Abuso (2018) recognized that Sociology graduate careers can branch out beyond the traditional teaching and research markets and traced the career trajectories of Sociology graduates from a private university. She found that the graduates initially engaged in entry-level positions related to research (e.g. field enumerator), education, government, and corporate (e.g. marketing staff). Abuso’s tracer study reported that these graduates eventually

moved on to careers that can be categorized as “Applied Sociology,” such as being involved in corporate social responsibility, public service and governance, education, and research and development.

While the previous discussion has shown that there are futures for Sociology graduates beyond teaching and research, it is also apparent that none of these other future professions is niche to Sociology alone. Instead, these are professions that graduates of other degree programs can also apply to. A common sentiment among sociological circles is that while Sociology does not provide a niche profession for its graduates, its training provides skills that can be useful in various workplace settings. Indeed, a survey involving Sociology graduates from 96 schools in the US in 2005 yielded that their sociological training provided the graduates with soft skills they found very useful in the workplace, including the capability to work with people from different races, classes, and genders, seeing society from alternative perspectives, being able to provide insights on current issues, and understanding how small groups work and how best to navigate them (Van Vooren & Spalter-Roth, 2010). In 2012, a similar survey was conducted. The respondents reported that having a sociological imagination, knowing sociological theories and concepts, being exposed to alternative perspectives or realities (all of which are useful to be able to give insights on various issues), and being familiar with various research designs and data analytical techniques are trainings in Sociology that proved very useful in the respondents’ various professions (Spalter-Roth & Van Vooren, 2014).

**Table 3**

*Reasons provided by students for considering a shift to another degree program offered in the same university (n=33)*

| Reasons for wanting to shift to another degree program                                   | %  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Respondent wanted to apply for acceptance in their first choice of degree program</i> | 48 |
| <i>Lack of interest in BA Sociology</i>                                                  | 24 |
| <i>Perceived lack of job prospects from a BA Sociology degree</i>                        | 21 |
| <i>Respondent’s parents want them to shift to another degree program</i>                 | 3  |
| <i>High rate of law school passers in other degree programs</i>                          | 3  |

**B. What are the reasons of students for choosing to stay under the BA Sociology program?**

From the data presented in the previous section, it is clear that many of the sophomore BA Sociology students did not originally intend to be part of the BA Sociology program, and the majority of them still considered leaving the program after two semesters of

training. It is, therefore, important to know why they decided to remain in the program despite a clear prevalence of lackluster attitude towards BA Sociology. The results in Table 4 suggest the primacy of personal interest in the decision to remain in the program. More than half (59%) explained that they have opted to remain in the program because they have learned to appreciate Sociology. It is worth noting that discussions with students indicate that this appreciation of the program can manifest in two ways:

First, the students realize that the most efficient (in terms of time spent in university and consequently also in terms of costs of education) course of action is to “settle” with Sociology instead of shifting to other programs. The cognitive dissonance between pursuing Sociology and having another degree program that they prefer over Sociology is neutralized by the fact that Sociology has a large area of inquiry, and even their preferred discipline (e.g. Psychology, political science) is also tackled in sociological discussions. In an earlier study conducted by Quintos and Iwayama (2024) of students of the same program and the same university, they observed that the prevailing student culture is one centered on practicality and efficiency – i.e. the goal of university education is to graduate immediately for economic reasons (lessened educational costs and immediate entry into paid work). This act of “settling” with Sociology runs parallel to that observed cultural orientation.

Second, students of the program have learned to appreciate the different concepts and theoretical perspectives offered in Sociology. The discipline, while obscure in terms of fame and job prospects, promises a different way of thinking – a different quality of mind – that enriches their lives outside of economic rewards. For students coming from working lower- and middle-class families, the discussions in Sociology largely dwell on understanding and seeking to remedy the plights of the working people. A related case study by Ocampo (2014) that also involved students from a state university was able to adequately capture the appeal of Sociology that students eventually grow to learn:

While it was not their first choice, the 24 students comprising the class have decided to stay in Sociology. All informants echoed the same reason for staying – the subject matter of Sociology. They have come to accept the discipline because of the perspective it offers. Most of them felt a sense of superiority over students from other courses, not because they knew of the financial opportunities available to Sociology majors but because of their ability to analyze what was happening around them. They believe that there is less chance of social mobility if you are a Sociology graduate but it is a discipline where intellectual development is present.

Despite previous discussions about the job prospects of Sociology, almost 2 in every 10 respondents (18%) said that they decided to remain in the program, because they are convinced that Sociology is related to their future desired profession: being a lawyer. While the concept of a pre-law course encompasses all four-year degree programs in the country, there is indeed a common perception that BA Sociology is a good pre-law course. An earlier study involving BA Sociology graduates from another Philippine state university reported that almost 1 in every 3 respondents chose to major in Sociology as a preparatory program for legal education (Nelson & Quintos, 2013), and graduates of the discipline have indeed eventually pursued legal education after their sociological training (Abuso, 2018) – including the authors of this paper. Finally, the data in Table 4 indicates that some students have chosen to remain in Sociology not out of any intrinsic motivation but rather due to a sense of learned helplessness: 10% of the respondents indicated that shifting to another degree program is bureaucratically difficult. Another 8% reported feeling that they have no choice but to continue with a BA in Sociology. Interestingly, some students of the program shared that they were told by the enrolment officer during their freshmen application process that they are not allowed to shift after they are accepted into the program. While this is not legally binding, and students are indeed technically allowed to shift, this belief sowed by their enrolment officer must have prevented some students from trying. Furthermore, the students shared there is some guilt associated with shifting because their enrolment officer told them that other freshmen applicants who really wanted to go into Sociology were deprived of the opportunity when they were accepted into the program. To shift, therefore, is to waste the slot given to them instead of those other freshmen applicants. Finally, the students and some faculty shared that there is an internal arrangement in the college where the programs have agreed to deny applications for shifting into their program if the applicant is from the college. This is reportedly to make sure that the student population of the college will not be skewed too much in favor of just one program. Since Sociology and Psychology are from the same college, this might explain why some respondents felt that it is useless to try to shift away from Sociology.

Outside of these reasons, very few respondents said that they want to give Sociology a chance (4%), especially since they have already made friends in the program (2%) which might make leaving more emotionally difficult.

**Table 4**

*Reasons provided by the students who considered shifting into another degree program as to why they decided to remain in the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology program*

| <b>Reasons for remaining in the BA Sociology program</b>                                             | <b>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Respondent has learned to appreciate Sociology because it is related to their other interests</i> | 59       |
| <i>Sociology is related to respondent's desired future profession (pre-law)</i>                      | 18       |
| <i>It is difficult to shift to another degree program</i>                                            | 10       |
| <i>Respondent feels that they have no choice but to continue with BA Sociology</i>                   | 8        |
| <i>Respondent is still trying to find their purpose and wants to give Sociology a chance</i>         | 4        |
| <i>Respondent already feels integrated with their group of friends in the program</i>                | 2        |

### **C. What are the students' perceived strengths and weaknesses of the BA Sociology program?**

As primary stakeholders of undergraduate education, the respondents were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program. It is assumed that their two semesters' worth of experience in BA Sociology is sufficient for them to have an informed perception of the matter. Table 5 summarizes the respondents' perceived strengths of the program while Table 6 summarizes the perceived weaknesses.

**Table 5**

*Students' perceived strengths of the program*

| <b>Perceived strengths of the BA Sociology program</b>                             | <b>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Sociology provides a different quality of thinking</i>                          | 47       |
| <i>Breadth of subject matter</i>                                                   | 24       |
| <i>Sociology provides a broader set of choices of future profession</i>            | 12       |
| <i>The program provides good training in critical thinking and problem-solving</i> | 10       |
| <i>Sociology is a good pre-law course</i>                                          | 4        |
| <i>The program provides good training in reading skills</i>                        | 4        |
| <i>Flexibility</i>                                                                 | 4        |
| <i>Relevant</i>                                                                    | 4        |
| <i>Do not know</i>                                                                 | 4        |
| <i>The program provides good training in working under pressure</i>                | 2        |

| Perceived strengths of the BA Sociology program                                     | % |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| <i>The program provides good training in communication and interpersonal skills</i> | 2 |
| <i>Faculty</i>                                                                      | 2 |
| <i>Unusual</i>                                                                      | 2 |
| <i>Curriculum structure</i>                                                         | 2 |

Similar to what has been discussed in the previous section, students of the program consider the so-called promise of Sociology – a different quality of mind or what practitioners of the discipline call the “sociological imagination” – as the main strength of the program (47%). This sociological imagination includes a breadth of concepts of theories that influence how students see the different aspects of their daily lives, a strength that has also been noted in previous studies about the advantages of sociological education (Spalter-Roth et al., 2012). A considerable proportion of the respondents also praise the breadth of Sociology’s subject matter (24%). As often discussed in Sociology classes, the scope of inquiry of Sociology (and therefore the choices for possible discussion in classes and choices for research) encompasses all aspects of social life from the most mundane to the most urgent, from the start of life to death. Even for students who are interested in other disciplinal pursuits, the typical Sociology curriculum offers a sociological take on the matter such as a Sociology of Economic Life for those interested in economics, a Sociology of Power and Political Life for those interested in political science, and a Sociology of Organizations for those interested in management to name a few. One in every ten respondents (10%) also lauded the program for its capability to train its students in critical thinking and problem-solving. These aspects of the training are often part of the training in developing a sociological imagination where students are challenged to rethink and reexamine existing realities and truth claims, and provide new approaches to solving or understanding social issues. Finally, the program has been described as one that provides its students with a broader set of choices for future professions (12%). Indeed, as noted in previous discussions, the sociological training received by the students does not necessarily guarantee them a spot in a niche market reserved for Sociology majors. However, the cognitive and soft skills that are core elements of sociological training allow its graduates to venture into different career paths.

In terms of weaknesses, five major points were identified by the respondents. First, around a third (35%) of the respondents once again mentioned the low job prospects of Sociology graduates. This is often paired with the second most commonly-mentioned weakness: Sociology is not famous in the Philippines. Worse, it is even looked down upon (26%). The problem of prestige in Philippine Sociology is a decades-old problem that has been felt by students and faculty alike. Back in the 1980s, Abad and Eviota (1987) already pointed out that Sociology pales in comparison with the other social science disciplines in terms of

popularity – a dismal observation given that the social sciences as a whole have been noted by the late Gelia Castillo, National Scientist for Rural Sociology, as being treated as “second class citizens” in the university setting (1983).

Beyond these issues of job prospects and prestige, the respondents also opined that there are issues in the Sociology curriculum (24%). The respondents criticized the content of the curriculum in two ways. First, there is some discontent in the subfields of Sociology that are offered to each batch of students. In the curriculum that the respondents are enrolled in, they are required to take various Sociology electives (e.g. Sociology of Religion, Sociology of the Family). These electives may vary from one batch to another. What happens is that the department offering the Sociology degree program will give the batch of students a set of choices on what Sociology elective to take and whatever elective is chosen by the majority will be offered. The rest of the electives will not be offered. This means two things: first, a batch of Sociology students will miss out on certain Sociology electives, and second, the set of Sociology electives taken by one batch will be different from another. This means that the different batches of students will have different curriculum content and may not be able to relate to each other in terms of the training they have undergone. Second, some respondents considered the Sociology curriculum to be quite “*Western*” in orientation instead of being indigenized or *decolonized* – though other observers of the developments in Sociology in the country have noted its indigenization and decolonization since the 1970s (Abad & Eviota, 1982; Bautista, 1987). Some respondents compared Sociology with Psychology, wherewith the latter has a *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* while the former has no concept of *Pilipinong Sosyolohiya* (though an attempt to craft this “Nationalist Sociology” has been made by Erasga, 2017). This line of commentary was quite surprising since the discussions in Sociology classes often made use of Philippine realities as the focus. What appears to be lacking based on the perception of the students is the wealth of reading materials, theories, and concepts in Sociology that are in Filipino. Instead, the concepts tend to remain predominantly in English, French, or German forms.

Some respondents also opined negatively that Sociology is difficult and time-consuming (18%). Comments from the respondents indicate that there are too many assigned reading materials in most Sociology courses. Furthermore, they complain about the emphasis on essays as a form of graded requirement in Sociology courses. Additionally, some respondents believe that Sociology is not practical (10%). These respondents argued that the problem with Sociology is that, like in Philosophy classes, there is not an absolute correct answer. Instead, the discipline dabbles with different perspectives, and a class session may end with more questions rather than concrete answers – a situation that they view negatively. Unfortunately, these observations are traditionally part of sociological training appreciated by many students – though there will unsurprisingly be those who will frown on it, especially if they are not wholly interested in the subject matter of Sociology, to begin with. As Senter et al. (2012) observed in their own study of Sociology majors, those who majored in Sociology

for “substantive” reasons tended to be satisfied with their sociological training, whereas those who majored in Sociology for “convenience” tended to view the training with lesser satisfaction.

As a final point on the matter, it must be noted that a very small fraction of the respondents said that Sociology is depressing (2%). This is a common commentary between professors and students in Sociology classes, wherein the group is painfully aware that the study of Sociology is the study of social inequalities and social problems that may not necessarily find any resolution in the foreseeable future.

**Table 6**

*Students’ perceived weaknesses of the program*

| <b>Perceived weaknesses of the BA Sociology program</b>                      | <b>%</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Perceived low number of job prospects after graduation</i>                | 35       |
| <i>Discipline is not famous in the Philippines and even looked down upon</i> | 26       |
| <i>Curriculum issues</i>                                                     | 24       |
| <i>Difficult and time-consuming</i>                                          | 18       |
| <i>Not practical</i>                                                         | 10       |
| <i>Depressing</i>                                                            | 2        |

**D. What are the plans of students after graduating from the BA Sociology program?**

The final part of the inquiry in this study looked into the future plans of the BA Sociology students after graduating from the program. This line of inquiry recognizes that none of these future plans are binding or set in stone. The authors, however, propose that there is wisdom in knowing the future plans of the students because these might provide context for their attitudes and motivations that are connected to their decision-making processes. For the purposes of the study, two timeframes were given to the respondents: 1 year after graduating and 5 years after graduating. Their responses are summarized in Table 7.

There is a very salient preference for the legal profession among the respondents in both timeframes. Around a quarter of the respondents (24%) seem to have plans to proceed with legal education immediately after graduating from the BA Sociology program. Meanwhile, more than a third of the respondents (35%) envision themselves either taking up legal education or already being a lawyer 5 years after graduating from the program. The presence of legal education and an eventual career as a lawyer is actually observable in the answers of the respondents to the various research questions of this study. In Table 1, BA Sociology being a pre-law course was one of the reasons provided by the respondents for enrolling in the program. In Table 3, some respondents believe that there are higher rates of law school

passers that graduate from other degree programs and they consequently wish to shift into those degree programs. In Table 4, the respondents identified Sociology's status as a pre-law course as one of the reasons why they decided to remain in the program. Finally, in Table 5, the students identified Sociology's status as a "good pre-law course" as one of its strengths. The respondents also lauded the Sociology program's training in reading skills – a skill based on observations and personal experiences, very important in legal education – as another strength of the program. Meanwhile, the traditional career directions of Sociology, teaching, and research were declared as future plans of the lesser proportion of respondents in both timeframes.

**Table 7**

*Declared future plans of the respondents 1 year and 5 years after graduating from the BA Sociology program*

| <b>Plans 1 year after graduating from the BA Sociology program</b> | <b>%</b> | <b>Plans 5 years after graduating from the BA Sociology program</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Legal Education</i>                                             | 24       | <i>Legal education or being a lawyer</i>                            | 35       |
| <i>Working in a profession related to Sociology</i>                | 12       | <i>Teaching</i>                                                     | 24       |
| <i>Teaching</i>                                                    | 12       | <i>Graduate Studies</i>                                             | 14       |
| <i>Government office</i>                                           | 10       | <i>Working</i>                                                      | 8        |
| <i>Further studies</i>                                             | 8        | <i>Research</i>                                                     | 8        |
| <i>Office work</i>                                                 | 8        | <i>Branching out into a different field from Sociology</i>          | 6        |
| <i>Working in a profession unrelated to Sociology</i>              | 8        | <i>Working in a non-government organization</i>                     | 6        |
| <i>Working</i>                                                     | 8        | <i>Do not know</i>                                                  | 6        |
| <i>Nothing</i>                                                     | 8        | <i>Social work</i>                                                  | 4        |
| <i>Masteral Degree</i>                                             | 6        | <i>Managing one's own business</i>                                  | 2        |
| <i>Looking for a job</i>                                           | 6        | <i>Journalism</i>                                                   | 2        |
| <i>Research</i>                                                    | 4        | <i>Having a family</i>                                              | 2        |
| <i>Social work</i>                                                 | 4        |                                                                     |          |
| <i>Working in a non-government organization</i>                    | 4        |                                                                     |          |
| <i>Supporting family members</i>                                   | 2        |                                                                     |          |
| <i>Finding one's passion</i>                                       | 2        |                                                                     |          |
| <i>Journalism</i>                                                  | 2        |                                                                     |          |

Given the findings of the study, the BA Sociology program appears to serve the role of a “stepping stone” in two different contexts. First, it is a stepping stone to the university where the students can obtain a Bachelor’s degree for minimal costs. By virtue of *R.A. 10931: Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act*, state-owned higher education institutions are accessible to Filipinos for free. The BA Sociology program under study is housed at a state university. The students’ entry into the BA Sociology program – a non-quota degree program that does not require high admission grades, therefore, is an economically rational choice for the respondents who come from middle- and lower-income households. Second, it is a stepping stone to legal education.

In the efforts of the American Sociological Association to understand the experiences of Sociology graduates, they observed that the possession of a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology is often not sufficient to provide the graduates with the human and social capital necessary to provide them with a long-term career. Instead, these graduates need additional human capital that they obtain through further education (Van Vooren & Spalter-Roth, 2010). In the case of Sociology graduates from the US, the most common destination of their further studies is social work and human services (34.8%), with legal education only accounting for 18.3% of the graduates. The difference in the rates between the US and Philippine experiences is perhaps not very surprising. Socio-culturally, the legal profession in the Philippines is part of the triumvirate of professions held in high regard (the other two professions being Medicine and Engineering). From a Filipino standpoint, being a lawyer, a medical doctor, or an engineer promises a life of high prestige and high economic rewards. To this end, having a son or daughter graduate and become part of any of these three professions has become a family-wide aspiration for many Filipinos. For families that, whether objectively or subjectively, are experiencing or concerned about the possibility of experiencing disenfranchisement due to the political issues that beset the country, there is also a budding aspiration to have either a police officer or lawyer in the family. To this end, being part of the legal profession is seen as a multi-functional goal for individuals and their families.

## E. Synthesis of Results

How do we make sense of all of these? In an earlier study that looked into the experiences of BA Sociology students, Quintos and Iwayama (2024) used the Parsonian AGIL (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency) framework of society to understand why BA Sociology students of the university under study behaved the way they did in their journey to graduate from the BA Sociology program. We posit that the same framework remains instrumental in understanding the findings of the study. The premise of the AGIL framework is that a system survives because the system is able to fulfill the following functions for itself:

First, Adaptation, wherewith the members of the system are provided with their needed resources and given security of access to these resources. Second, Goal Attainment, wherewith the system has a clear idea or vision of what future it intends to achieve and what it needs to achieve that future. Third, Integration, wherewith the system is populated by the right variety of men and women necessary for the system to survive and achieve its goals. Included in this integrative function is the recruitment/reproduction and training of the members of the system. Fourth, Latency, wherewith the system keeps its members motivated enough that they will push forward in training and achieving the goals of the system.

In this study, the results suggest that the Latency and Integration parts of the system are failing. In terms of Integration, the program does not seem to be recruiting the right students. This is not to slight the cognitive skills of the students. Instead, the disjoint is manifest in their motivation. Many of these students did not wish to be part of the BA Sociology program during their freshman year, and the majority of them considered shifting to other degree programs. Many of these students do not envision themselves as sociologists in the future but rather as lawyers, and BA Sociology is largely just a stepping stone toward a free tuition university education and legal education. This lack of motivation to be sociologists may, as Quintos and Iwayama (2024) explained, largely be a deficiency in the Adaptation part of the system wherewith being a sociologist is not a socio-economically-rewarding endeavor (a point repeatedly discussed in this paper as the respondents struggle with the perceived low prestige and low job prospects of Sociology). All of these shed doubt on the efficacy of BA Sociology as a degree program and perhaps it now falls to the goal-attainment function of the system to decide how best to move forward from this. This now begs the following major questions:

First, the previous discussions and related literature have repeatedly suggested that one of the issues with BA Sociology programs is that it is getting students who neither want Sociology nor want to become sociologists in the future. One related literature has gone as far as declaring that Sociology has become a “*dumping ground for students who do not make the grade in other courses.*” Given these, in terms of the Integrative function, what should the BA Sociology program do in terms of recruitment? How will it attract the “right” kind of students? While it struggles to attract these students, should it impose more stringent qualifications to filter out those who might intend to use the program as a stepping stone to enter the university?

A decade ago, in a Philippine state university where the first author served as the head of the Sociology division, the question of whether the program should filter out those applicants who, based on the assessment of the faculty, merely intend to use BA Sociology as a stepping stone. A senior faculty opined that it might be imprudent to filter these kinds of students, and perhaps the better course of action is to find ways to resocialize these students during the 4 years of sociological training to want to become sociologists. In practical terms,

it might be imprudent for the BA Sociology program to be very stringent in its recruitment practices, given that it is already difficult to recruit students amidst the competition among the many and continuously increasing degree programs. The BA Sociology will still have to justify that it has sufficient enrollees lest it risks being removed from the list of program offerings of the university. The fact remains, however, that it is difficult to motivate students to want to become sociologists, given the discipline's inability to ensure rewards in terms of prestige and socio-economic gains.

This brings us to the second question: If the students prevalently intend to use the BA Sociology program as a pre-law course, is it practical for the program to just lean into this reality and actually package itself as a preparatory undergraduate course for aspiring legal education students (subject to the standards on Sociology curricula prescribed by CHED Memo No. 40, S. 2017 – Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and supposing that it is possible to marry the traditions of Sociology and legal education without conflict in terms of principles)? Traditionally, aspiring legal education students are given by the Legal Education Board (LEB, the body given authority by the Philippine State to administer and supervise law schools pursuant to R.A. No. 7662) the following requisites before they are accepted in a law school:

Section 16. Board Prerequisites for Admission to the LL.B. or J.D. Program. -The Board shall apply Section 6 of Rule 138 in the following wise: An applicant for admission to the LL.B. or J.D. program of studies must be a graduate of a bachelor's degree and must have earned at least eighteen (18) units in English, six (6) units in Mathematics, and eighteen (18) units of social science subjects." (LEB Memorandum Order (LEBMO) No. 1 (Series of 2011))

The supposed status of BA Sociology as a "good pre-law course" might stem from the fact that it satisfies the required 18 units of social science subjects and presumably the 6 units of mathematics (to which the statistics courses of the typical BA Sociology curriculum suffices). The only thing lacking might be the 18 units of English units which depends on the curriculum of BA Sociology programs (in the case of both authors, for example, they had to take extra English units outside of the prescribed BA Sociology curriculum to satisfy the required 18 units). Beyond these requisites, it is probably debatable whether the common "hidden curriculum" of BA Sociology – i.e., the practice of having several required reading materials for students to consume per major course and the emphasis on recitation or class participation as a grade requirement – are also part of the equation when it is described as a "good pre-law course."

It is important to note, however, that a recent development makes a significant change regarding the subject matter. Pursuant to LEB Memorandum Circular (LEBMC) No. 113, Series of 2022, the required units for mathematics, English, and social science are now suspended

and law schools are now given the freedom to determine their own reasonable admission policies. This means that law schools may retain the old unit requirements, remove the unit requirements altogether, or impose their own set of unit requirements.

Given these circumstances, the identity of Sociology as a good pre-law course is very suspect, and the window of opportunity for the program to lean into its identity as a pre-law course may already be closed. Ultimately, this returns us to the first conundrum: What should the BA Sociology program do in terms of recruitment? Should it operate under the “status quo” of its usual profile of students? If not, how will it attract the “right” kind of students? And while it struggles to attract these students, should it impose more stringent qualifications to filter out those who might intend to use the program as a stepping stone to enter the university? This question – given its importance to the destiny of the program – is something beyond the capability of the authors to answer. It is, however, a question that Sociology departments might need to ponder.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that having BA Sociology as one’s degree program is often more a consequence of constraining factors (i.e. inability to qualify for their primary choice of degree program but having no other recourse but to study in the state university due to the free tuition benefit) rather than a function of one’s absolute freedom of choice for the respondents of the study. Even for those who were able to exercise their freedom to choose, the odds of choosing BA Sociology – either as a primary or secondary choice of the degree program – seem to be often a matter of how well the discipline of Sociology was introduced to the students during their senior high school education. Other modes of exposure to Sociology, such as onscreen or in print, also contributed, albeit very limitedly, to the program’s recruitment capabilities. This limited contribution may not necessarily be due to the inefficacy of such channels of recruitment but is more of a result of minimal opportunity for exposure. Sociology programs may be wise to explore the possibility of Sociology-related YouTube, TikTok, and podcast content to increase the visibility of the discipline and inspire young Filipinos to consider Sociology as their undergraduate program of choice. A year after being accepted into the BA Sociology program and being enrolled in some of its major courses, a majority of the student body still considered the possibility of shifting to another degree program. The predominant reason for this consideration to shift is their sustained interest in their primary degree program of choice during their freshman year. Therefore, a year after accepting the students into the program, the program is still in peril of becoming a mere stepping stone into other degree programs. After two semesters of being integrated into the BA Sociology program, these sophomore BA Sociology students recognized the quality of thinking that is honed by the program – often called in the field as the “Sociological Imagination” – and the breadth of the subject matter that is under the purview of sociological inquiry as the main strengths of

the program. Despite the recognized strengths of the program, the sophomore respondents lamented that the program is bogged down by the perception that Sociology as a discipline, and by extension its degree programs, has a low number of prospects or opportunities in the Philippine job market. Perhaps connected to this, the sophomore respondents also described the Sociology program as “not famous” and “looked down upon.” Perhaps due to this low job prospect and low-prestige status of Sociology, it was also found that the students do not see themselves in the future as sociologists (i.e. those involved in teaching Sociology or doing sociological research). Instead, the most common trend is for students to use Sociology as a stepping stone to become a lawyer – a profession perceived to be associated with more job opportunities, economic rewards, and prestige in Philippine society.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of the study identify areas for improvement and provide strategic recommendations for the recruitment and retention of students in BA Sociology programs. First, to attract younger generations, Sociology departments should enhance their visibility by creating engaging content for popular online platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook. This content could focus on discussions surrounding contemporary social issues in the Philippines, emphasizing the importance of sociological perspectives in understanding these challenges. Through social media, departments can connect more effectively with potential students and demonstrate the relevance of Sociology in today’s society. Second, departments offering BA Sociology should collaborate with senior high schools to effectively integrate Sociology into their curricula. This initiative will help students grasp the discipline’s significance and relevance early on, potentially increasing interest in pursuing a degree in Sociology. Third, to combat misconceptions regarding limited job prospects for Sociology graduates, departments should organize seminars and workshops that outline various career paths available to Sociology graduates. Inviting alumni to share their experiences can provide current students with valuable insights into how they can use their degrees in diverse fields. Fourth, to retain current BA Sociology students, departments must actively organize events that foster camaraderie among students, such as brown bag discussions. These informal gatherings can strengthen students’ commitment to the program. Additionally, collaborating with student organizations to create peer support groups or mentorship programs can help newer students connect with upperclassmen for guidance and support. Lastly, to maintain student interest and engagement, it is crucial for departments to ensure their curricula are regularly updated. Coordinating with faculty to incorporate contemporary materials that resonate with student interests is essential for keeping the program relevant and appealing.

By implementing these recommendations, BA Sociology programs can enhance their appeal to prospective students while improving retention rates among current enrollees. Focusing on visibility, addressing job market perceptions, fostering community, and ensuring curriculum relevance will be crucial in positioning Sociology as a valuable field of study in the Philippines.

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