

# Graduate Students' Satisfaction on the Thesis Advising Practices

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**Abstract** – *This descriptive action research focused on the satisfaction of the students on the advising practices of their thesis advisers. The 28 respondents of the study were purposively and incidentally chosen. The findings, derived from the use of unstructured interview and survey questionnaire, revealed that most of the students are satisfied with their thesis advisers in terms of their knowledge of student's research, professional characteristics and qualities, and personality factors as revealed by the overall weighted mean values of 2.68, 2.72, and 2.72 respectively. The students along thesis advising observed various practices of the faculty members. Students chose their advisers based on their availability, field of specialization, and coaching and mentoring abilities. Based on the findings, this study recommends that the faculty members be given more training to further enhance their abilities in thesis advising. The college may also tap other research-reputable faculty members to become research advisers. An orientation activity among the students may also be conducted to assist them in choosing the faculty member with an appropriate research reputation and also to brief them on the roles they will play as thesis advisers. The need to revisit the policies of the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) is also highly recommended. Hence, this study proposes some amendments on the existing guidelines of the department along thesis advising.*

**Keywords** – *Satisfaction, Practices, Thesis Adviser, Policy Enhancement, State College*

## INTRODUCTION

The roles of the thesis advisers have started to gain a strong impact on the academic success of the students. Comparatively, the roles that they play now are very much distinct from what they portrayed previously. The advising tasks of the faculty members has transcended from the traditional adviser-advisee exchange of thesis chapters to the modern and technology-driven techniques of advising fueled by the stringent demands of the times. Most of the universities and colleges now impose publications and paper presentations as part of the requirements for graduation in advanced education. And to reach these stages, the quality of the research is the topmost consideration. The various existing publications and paper presentation organizers, just like everybody else in education, are also pressured by the standards set by the different internal or external factors that are now serving as mechanisms to gauge the delivery services of the higher education institutions (HEI) in the country. Because of this, they too abide by the strict compliance of the authors on their respective

editorial policy. To check the quality of the paper, various test were ran to determine whether the paper is fit for presentation or publication.

In line with this, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) prescribes some requirements on the qualifications of the research adviser. The Commission is particular in terms of the research publications of the faculty aside from his/her educational qualifications. This is why CMO No. 36, s.1998 provides that faculty research advisers shall be chosen based on the quality of their published works in the peer reviewed professional journals [1]. In addition, CMO No. 9, s. 2003 stipulates that the faculty members in HEIs should publish researches in refereed national or international journals and present their research accomplishment in local and international fora [2]. These CHED requirements further enhance the research capability of the faculty members making them more skilful to handle research writers.

The quality of researches of the students is greatly anchored on the research capability of the faculty.

The fate of research to either succeed or fail is largely dependent on the ability of the faculty member. However, this ability does not only mean giving the students the guidance but also to keep them going by ignoring the self-doubts created by the transition in the academic life of the student. Explicitly, with these premises, choosing a thesis adviser therefore is critical. Loui [3] stressed that the decision to choose a thesis adviser is very important among students because their choice will affect everything in their career. Stark [4] emphasized that there is no such thing as right or wrong way to choose a dissertation or thesis adviser. It does not matter as to what means is employed in selecting the adviser for as long as the person you chose is one whom you can trust and feel comfortable with. However, sometimes this does not happen especially when the preferred adviser of the student is no longer available. This is because every graduate faculty is only allowed a maximum of five active advisees at a given time [1].

The ideas presented provided foundation to pursue this study that aims to determine the satisfaction of the students on and identify the factors that prompted them to choose their thesis adviser. Several advantages can be realized from this study on the part of the college, the faculty members, and the students themselves. The college may benefit from this study because this looked into the perceptions of the students on their satisfaction on the faculty members as thesis advisers. With this, the department and the college as a whole may be given an idea of how the existing policies and guidelines along thesis advising be enhanced to suit the needs of the students. The faculty members themselves may also be informed of how the students regarded them as research adviser and the information they obtained may be utilized as foundation for establishing a more comprehensive adviser-advisee interactions and a good thesis advising practices. Especially for the students this study is most significant. This research may provide them an idea of the various factors that they may consider when selecting a thesis adviser. They may also be enlightened with the things they may expect from their advisers knowing that advising is not only for completing the research work but let alone on assisting them in terms of their professional advancement.

Finally, this study hopes to revisit the existing policies on thesis advising and propose enhancements to it to meet the standards of CHED and other external

factors that are now gaining an increased recognition as a propelling mechanism to attain excellence in research. This is also the reason why the SGS is now in transition of requiring thesis publications as an additional requirement for graduation. Currently, however, it is enough that the papers be applied for publication only and determines the evaluation and decision of the publisher on the submitted paper. But eventually, this requirement will be completely adopted by the department to determine whether the SGS students are at par with other students in other SUCs in terms of research capability.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study generally aims to determine the satisfaction of the students on their thesis adviser. Specifically it includes the following objectives: 1) Identify the preferences of the students when choosing thesis adviser; 2) determine the satisfaction of the students on their thesis advisers along knowledge of the student's research, professional characteristics and qualities, and personality factors; 3) determine the practices of the faculty member as thesis advisers; and 4) propose enhancement on the existing policy of the college along thesis advising.

#### **METHODS**

This action research involved a descriptive-survey method. Twenty-eight (28) graduate students were purposively chosen to compose the respondents of the study. This number was based on the 28 faculty members who were appointed by the Dean of SGS as thesis advisers from Summer 2015 up to the second semester of the SY 2015-2016. Hence the respondents are graduates of March 2016.

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was used to gather the data. The instrument was formulated by using different readings materials. The variables and the corresponding indicators on the satisfaction of the students along knowledge of student's research, professional characteristics and qualities, and personality factors were referred to the said materials. However, in terms of preferences of the students, the indicators considered were based on the results of the unstructured interviews conducted by the researcher to randomly selected SGS student enrolled in *Thesis Writing I* during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester of the school year 2015-2016. To validate the questionnaire, a dry-run was conducted to eight SGS students enrolled in *Thesis Writing I*.

The data were personally gathered using the paper-pencil method and also through technology-aided methods like email and through social media such as Facebook. To ensure the ethical considerations of the study, the names of the thesis advisers were not indicated in the survey questionnaire and also the name of the respondents. The thesis advisers are either full-time or part-time faculty members of the School of Graduate Studies. Ranking, weighted mean, frequency, and percentage were used to facilitate analysis and interpretation of data. To identify the level of satisfaction of the graduate students on the advising practices of their thesis advisers, the following scale was used: 2.5-3.0 satisfied (S), 1.5-2.49 moderately satisfied (MS), and 1.0-1.49 not satisfied (NS).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Student's Preferences in Choosing Their Thesis Adviser**

Criteria	Sum of Ranks	Final Rank
Field of specialization	82	3
Has interest in your research	122	4.5
Coaching and mentoring abilities	56	2
Attitude of the person	122	4.5
Research Reputation	181	7
Compatible personality	180	6
Availability of the faculty member	41	1

Table 1 shows the various criteria considered by the students in choosing their thesis adviser. Occupying the 1<sup>st</sup> place is the availability of the faculty member. Evidently, the students prioritized faculty members who, most of the times are available. This consideration could be because all graduate students are working and some of them come from distant places and they want that every time they go to their adviser, he/she is available. This result finds support from Longren [5]. She underscored that since the time required to research and write a thesis is lengthy, the student must know whether the adviser will be available to read the draft and present a meaningful feedback. This is because professors most of the time, aside from teaching and doing research, are also tasked to do different works like preparing proposal for a new curriculum, a proposal intended for the conduct of seminars, as consultants, and other academic-related jobs.

Second among the considerations of the students is the coaching and mentoring abilities of the faculty members. Coaching and mentoring abilities pertain to the skills of the faculty members in giving students not only directions on the completion of the thesis, but also on their professional development. This consideration of the student signifies that they are not only after finishing their thesis or dissertation but also to be trained in other aspects of becoming a research enthusiast that is primarily important to advancing ones career path. Cohen [6] identified that the students as stakeholders expect that the school provides them career advancement and high quality and accessible faculty. This statement gives the impression that the students expect much from the school and the faculty themselves when it comes to their professional needs and development.

Third in rank is the field of specialization of the faculty member as one of the criteria of the students. Prioritizing the specialization of the faculty over the other criteria gives the idea that the student is more concerned on the knowledge of the faculty member in relation to the topic at hand. An adviser must possess an expertise in the field in which the student plans to write his/her thesis so that the adviser can offer guidance along the path the research and fieldwork will take [5]. Meanwhile, the rest of the rankings show that the students are not too particular in terms of attitude of a person, likeness of personality, and research reputation.

### Satisfaction of the Students on their Thesis Advisers

This section discusses the level of satisfaction of the students on their thesis adviser in terms of knowledge of student's research, professional characteristics and qualities, and personal factors. These variables were taken from the article of Brown [7].

**Knowledge of Student's Research.** Table 2 reveals various indicators that describe the adviser in terms of knowledge of student's research. This indicator describes the capability and know-how of the faculty advisers to assist the students in relation to research topic.

Among the indicators, the expertise of the adviser to provide directions on the framework of analysis of the results of the investigation got the highest mean of 2.86 described as *satisfied*. This finding suggests that the faculty members are already experts on this aspect

of thesis advising and can be attributed to their being regularly engaged in research as mandated by the college. Allen and Smith [8] also stated that faculty are not expected to become advisers and teachers only; they also ought to conduct research, participate in institutional governance, and provide service to the broader community and their discipline.

Having a broad knowledge of the variables involved in the study and connect the relationships between or among them and clarifying confusions of the methodology of the study were both rated as *satisfied* with a mean of 2.82 and 2.79 respectively. It reflects that most of the advisers are knowledgeable on the research topic and in the research process itself. Familiarity on quantitative relationships and similarity of the field of specialization between the adviser and advisee are also denoted by the results. It also illustrates that the faculty members had been engaged to research projects with varying degrees of difficulty that further trained them. These engagements honed their capabilities in doing research.

**Table 2. Knowledge of the Thesis Advisers on Student's Research**

Indicators	WM	VI
a. Has a broad knowledge of the variables involved in the study and the relationships or connections between or among them.	2.82	S
b. Can clarify confusions pertaining to the methodology of the study.	2.79	S
c. Has the specialization or expertise to provide directions to the framework of analysis to effectively discuss the results of the investigation.	2.86	S
d. Can help identify applications of the research being conducted.	2.25	MS
<b>Overall weighted mean</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>S</b>

On the contrary, helping the students identify the usefulness of the research project was only rated as *moderately satisfied* with a mean of 2.25. This result shows that the students are not fully contented with the insights given by the advisers in terms of the applicability of the research outputs. Shapiro [9], described outputs as the “what” that must come out of the activities that should lead to the achievement of the key result area at which they are aimed. The ratio between the number of faculty researches conducted and the number of outputs actually utilized can explain this result. Most of the research outputs end

up unutilized or not translated into something beneficial. Thus, it is understood that if the faculty themselves find it hard to identify the applicability of their own researches how much more that of the students. This information may lead to the conclusion that most of the researches conducted by the students have outputs that were likewise unutilized. This finding is in contrast with the idea of Shapiro [9]. The output is the realization of the objective of research that is supposed to be used at the advantage of the target user. Using the output is the yardstick of effectiveness and worth of doing the research.

In general, the students are *satisfied* on their thesis advisers as revealed by the overall weighted mean of 2.68. This indicates that the thesis advisers are knowledgeable in terms of student's research. They are capable to give directions and guidance on how the research will go about since they are familiar with every part of the research process. This research exercise made them aware of their duties and responsibilities in assisting the students write their paper making them capable to handle advising tasks in the graduate school.

**Table 3. Professional Characteristics and Qualities of Thesis Advisers**

Indicators	WM	VI
a. Provides mentoring assistance	2.46	MS
b. Has an extensive research network	2.75	S
c. Possesses a research reputation befitting to a thesis adviser	2.79	S
d. Interacts well with the advisee or thesis committee members	2.89	S
<b>Overall weighted mean</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>S</b>

Table 3 reveals the different indicators that describe the faculty members in terms of their professional characteristics and qualities as thesis advisers.

The faculty members can equally interact well with both the advisee and the thesis committee, thus the mean of 2.89 interpreted as *satisfied*. This result connotes that the faculty and the student has a good adviser-advisee relationship. This is because writing a dissertation (or thesis) is a product of the dynamic relationship that compels dedication and cooperation between the adviser and the student that develops throughout the research process [10]. The finding also suggests that the workplace is free from conflict and personal issues. Aside from this, it also illustrates that

the thesis advisers possess interpersonal intelligence. A person gifted with interpersonal intelligence can work well with others. Gardner described interpersonal intelligence as the ability to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people that make them work effectively with others [11]. A thesis adviser with such characteristics can mingle and work efficiently with others. He/she can establish a harmonious adviser-advisee relationship inherent with openness, honesty, and confidence. A student exposed to this kind of association will gain a positive outlook or experience in research that can lead to nullify the notion that research is actually difficult.

The students are also *satisfied* on the research reputation and research network of the faculty members as revealed by the mean of 2.79 and 2.75 respectively. Operationally, research reputation pertains to the track record in research of the faculty members such as publications, paper presentations, and/or production of copyrighted research outputs. This finding indicates that most of the thesis advisers are researchers and have established track record along publication, paper presentations, and/or have produced copyrighted materials. Meanwhile, research network connotes connections of the faculty members to different research enthusiasts and accesses to various research resources or sources. Nicholas, et. al. [12] observed that the scholarly world of networking has become a recurring and emerging theme in various academic discussions. Networking has fully become one of the effective machineries that propel triumphs in research. Overall, these findings present that the faculty members are involved in distinct research organizations and have founded numerous linkages with its members. Access to various research resources is also possible for a faculty with an extensive research network.

Finally, the mentoring assistance of the thesis advisers got the lowest mean value of 2.46 described as *moderately satisfied*. The students, evidently, did not adequately meet this characteristic of thesis adviser. It denotes that they lack mentoring abilities manifested by the insufficiency of information, guidance, and assistance they provide their advisees. Mentoring includes demonstrating productive work habits and attitudes, sharing one's experiences in dealing with the challenges and frustration of doing academic research, offering friendship and encouragement, and lending a sympathetic ear to help the students minimize the transition challenges that

may stand in the way of realizing skills development and effective performance [13]. The tasks of a mentor cannot be overemphasized in the success of the students. Mentors provide guidance not only on helping the advisee formulate a good research question and formulate an appropriate experiment, but also to train the student over time and make him/her a research buff capable of publishing papers in different journals, reviewing paper for publication, attaining a successful career [14], and also to become a good mentor someday. The increasing demand for research tells that teachers or faculty members is no longer limited to become efficient and effective instructional leaders. Their roles have been expanded to also become facilitators of research [15].

Generally, the respondents are *satisfied* with their advisers in terms of their professional characteristics and qualities as revealed by the overall weighted mean value of 2.72. This result posits the idea that the students are contented with the research track record of the faculty members. It also denotes that the students are aware of the research capabilities of the faculty member and they trust them. Thus, an adviser must be your advocate, someone you can trust, and one who will help you does your best work possible [4].

**Table 4. Personality of the Faculty Members as Thesis Advisers**

Indicators	WM	VI
a. Shows interest in the research work by being vocal and enthusiastic during discussion of the paper	2.89	S
b. Possesses positive attitudes that foster openness, rapport and harmonious adviser-advisee relationship	2.54	S
c. Cares and shows concern on the professional development of the advisee	2.68	S
d. Has a personality that is compatible to you in general.	2.79	S
<b>Overall weighted mean</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>S</b>

Operationally, personality factors refer to the inherent characteristics of the faculty member as a person that reflects his/her attitudes as a thesis adviser. Table 4 shows the indicators that pertain to these factors.

It shows that most of the students are *satisfied* with their advisers in terms of showing their interest in the student's research work as revealed by the mean of

2.89 implying that the faculty member and the student have similar field of specialization. Sharing similar interest in research between the adviser and the student could become a foundation for developing a mentoring relationship according to Vogt [16]. When the ideas of the adviser and the advisee run parallel it creates a harmony between them that unconsciously kindles a good mentor-mentee relationship. If this happens, exchange of ideas becomes natural and much easier.

The compatibility between the adviser and the advisee was also assessed by the students as *satisfied* as shown by the mean value of 2.79. This finding bears implication that the nature, character and behavior of the two parties complement each other. Thus, they get along well with one another making the interaction soothing and easy. Stark [4] also stressed that when a student selects an adviser, that person should be one whom he/she is comfortable working with. Relax encounters between the adviser and the advisee creates an effective matching of ideas. Hence, making the deliberations spontaneous and rewarding.

Caring and showing concern on the professional development of the students was given a mean of 2.68 also described as *satisfied*. The result indicates that the thesis advisers manifested their concern not only for the student to graduate but also to make use of his/her degree as another foundation and capital in investing for his/her professional development. The graduate students of the SGS are composed of teachers, school heads, or government employees, which means that their professional developments vary. However, though they vary yet every student deserves the same amount of encouragement or motivation from the adviser to see to it that the degrees they are pursuing will lead them to a career path that will flourish with rewarding and noteworthy accomplishments.

On the other hand, though with the lowest mean of 2.54, the students are also *satisfied* on the indicator saying that the advisers possess positive attitudes that foster openness, rapport and harmonious adviser-advisee relationship. This implies the observations and experiences of the students in terms of the behavior and attitudes demonstrated by the advisers. An adviser is open-minded when he/she understands the difficulty the student is going through in the entire research process. When the student is shared by the same experience the adviser went through, his/her difficulty may be lessened thinking that no one is spared from the temporary hardship of doing research. Therefore,

an adviser should be one who is calm, supportive, and will help the student overcome self-doubts [4]. As a whole, the students are contented with their advisers in terms of their personality as revealed by the overall weighted mean of 2.72 also described as *satisfied*.

### **Thesis Advising Practices of the Faculty Members**

The students observed many practices of the faculty members as thesis advisers. These observations relate to thesis consultations, checking of manuscript and conduct of meetings.

The students commonly experienced to be accommodated by their advisers for consultation in the school any time they approach them. Majority of the students are working either in teaching or doing other office works, so they usually consult their advisers late in the afternoon. On the other hand, according to the students especially those from far-flung areas, they confer with their advisers at times through texts, email, or FB if they cannot afford to leave their posts. Meanwhile, others are entertained at the residence of the adviser at a prescribed time. Sharing some of the time supposedly spent for the family is a good practice of the faculty member. During Saturdays, advisees are usually entertained during the free time only of those faculty members who are teaching in the graduate school.

The students before every oral defense cannot miss consultations. Each student regularly consults the adviser before the title, pre-oral, and final defenses. It provides directions from the smallest detail to the most complex process of defending a thesis. This practice of the faculty gives the student a picture of what actually transpires in an oral defense that somehow provide an imaginary feeling of being subjected to the scrutiny of the thesis committee.

Faculty members vary in terms of their practices when it comes to the checking of the manuscript. Out of 28 students, 17 or 61% of them responded that their advisers still prefer the traditional use of the hard copy when checking the manuscript. On the other hand, only 3 or 11% prefer to use the soft copy and 8 or 28% can check in either form. These low figures can be attributed to the technology know-how and access to ICT facilities of the faculty members. The Internet connections in the SGS cannot be relied upon for this purposes either due to intermittent connections or because there is no signal at all.

Most of the faculty members do not conduct regular meetings. The adviser and the advisee meet

only whenever the student goes to the adviser. This is because regular meetings cannot be scheduled since all the SGS students are also working and they cannot easily leave their post during weekdays. Other faculty members gather all their advisees at the same time in a meeting to avoid repeating the same instructions to them.

These practices are in general unstandardized. Meaning, each faculty has his/her own practice. The department does not intrude on the techniques or strategies utilized by the faculty members to facilitate adviser-advisee interactions. According to Leahey [17] unstandardized practices are dependent on the research experience of the faculty that are difficult to transmit interpersonally even through advising. Meaning the strong engagements of the faculty in research spells out the kind of practice he/he displays.

### **Proposed Policy Enhancement on Thesis Advising**

The existing policy of the department along thesis advising only caters to the selection criteria, the duties and responsibilities of the adviser, and the roles of the Dean on thesis advising. Enhancements on the said policies will be proposed to include also the duties and responsibilities of the students. Other procedures may also be infused to determine the readiness of the student for oral defense. It will be proposed that the adviser need to certify the readiness of his/her advisee prior to the defense. Templates may also be devised to facilitate the procedures that will guide the students on their thesis advising.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The students are satisfied on their thesis advisers in terms of their knowledge on student's research, professional characteristics and qualities, and personality factors. The students prefer the availability, coaching and mentoring abilities, and field of specialization of the faculty members as bases for choosing them. The thesis advising practices of the faculty members vary and are unstandardized. The highlight of this study that could be the source of new information is the revelation that though the students are generally satisfied in terms of the advising practices of the graduate faculty yet there are still many information that the advisees need to know in terms of the roles of the advisers. This may also deepen their understanding that there are many factors like coaching and mentoring, and research reputation that are more important than merely considering 'the

availability of the faculty' as their basis for choosing a thesis adviser. This research also provides information on the various strategies that the advisers do to carry out their advising tasks. From this, the readers may determine whether the strategy is a common practice, a good practice or otherwise.

This study therefore recommends that the faculty members be given more training to further enhance their abilities and practices in thesis advising. The college may also tap other research-reputable faculty members to become research advisers. An orientation activity among the students may also be conducted to assist them in choosing the faculty member with an appropriate research reputation and also to brief them on the roles they will play as thesis advisers. Since this study is only limited to the satisfaction of the students on the advising practices of the graduate faculty, another research may also be conducted by considering the existing policies of the department as the focus. This way, the SGS will be provided information in terms of the adequacy of the policy in governing thesis writing. Hence the need to revisit the policies of the School of Graduate Studies may be given attention. A study may also be conducted to determine also the satisfaction of the advisers on their advisees and also on the policies of the college.

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