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## ***PHINMA University of Iloilo Students Gain Employment Advantage through Career Services***

In November 2015, Mr. Eduardo Arevalo assumed the role of Chief Operating Officer (COO) at the PHINMA University of Iloilo (UI), in Iloilo City. As COO, Mr. Arevalo was tasked with a variety of responsibilities, but one that particularly stood out to him was development of UI's nascent career center. The career center had opened only a year earlier and while several new programs had been developed, it still lacked the resources and management attention needed to thrive. Mr. Arevalo saw the potential value of the center and decided to devote himself to seeing it succeed.

The Philippines is home to more than 2,000 higher education institutions. However, while academically strong, many of the universities have few tools to offer students that will provide experiential learning — or “real-world” application of what is being taught. As a result, students are often unprepared for their careers and employers have little to no input into student development. The Philippines has seen strong economic growth over the past decade, with major increases in the services, construction, science and technology fields. While much of the country’s economic development is attributable to the rapid growth of the capital city, Manila, provincial cities such as Iloilo are also seeing considerable growth. From 2008-2012, the city saw consistent 4% growth across all sectors, with significantly higher percentages in the construction, hospitality, and service sectors.<sup>1</sup> Despite this rapid economic growth, due to the disconnect between the academic institutions and industries in the city, unemployment persists among university-educated graduates and many, unable to find work in Iloilo, make the decision to move to Manila or out of the Philippines altogether to find employment.

As Mr. Arevalo reviewed UI’s career center development over the previous year, he noted that the project had begun in February 2014 when UI was accepted to a program as a part of the new USAID initiative, called the Science, Technology, Research and Innovation for Development

“The programs offered by the universities are mostly not synchronized and directed to the specific needs of the industries located in Iloilo City. This is one of the primary reasons for unemployment and underemployment in the city as well as the high graduate migration out of Iloilo City. The local government, together with the private and business sector...should institutionalize a set-up that establishes a feedback mechanism between the academe and the industry on the relevance of the academic institutions’ curriculum to the needs of the business sector.”

*USAID Industry Study: Iloilo City Investment Enabling Environment (INVEST) Project  
December 2014*

<sup>1</sup> USAID Industry Study: Iloilo City ([http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00K8KP.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K8KP.pdf))

(STRIDE) project. Mr. Arevalo also noted that the project was being implemented in partnership with the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan (WDI) and UI was receiving technical support from two U.S. experts, Mr. Andrew Ceperley from Loyola Marymount University, and Mr. Christian Garcia from the University of Miami.

While UI's administration had seen the value of starting a career center, the project began with no dedicated staff, no space, and very few resources. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Ceperley made an initial site visit in September 2014 and recommended in their report that the career center adopt four strategic initiatives to achieve success and sustainability:

“Employers offered mixed reviews as to the application of the classroom teaching to the needs of Industry. We met a number of faculty members who serve as part-time adjunct professors while pursuing their own careers. This strategy can be highly beneficial in exposing students to “real world” situations, and it complements more traditional curricula. However, we also received consistent feedback from a variety of stakeholders expressing concern about a slow process at UI for curriculum change that would modify the classroom experience to improve students’ employability.”

*Mr. Andrew Ceperley  
Site Visit Report  
October 2014*

- **Place:** A designated, visible space should be allocated for the career center. A physical career center office would give staff a place to work and would provide students and employers with a location to conduct meetings, career counseling, and interviews.
- **Programs:** UI should develop new programs targeted primarily at student development and industry engagement. The report particularly noted the disparity between the existing curricula at UI and the needs of employers and suggested that the career center take ownership to improve the existing but disorganized On-the-Job Training (OJT) program at UI.
- **People:** While several part-time staff were assigned to the career center, a formal career center director should be appointed and UI should ramp up hiring of center staff over the next four years.
- **Resources:** UI should continue to increase the resources devoted to the career center. While financial resources were vital, in order to be successful, the university administration should also prioritize the center.

While some progress had been made against these recommendations, for example in the area of new program development, Mr. Arevalo noted that the majority of the recommendations had not been met. The career center had received the attention of several dedicated staff at UI including Ms. Maita Magalang, the director of the Center for Student Development and Leadership, but it still lacked a full-time director. The career center had also been granted a small space and several new programs had been started, but it still did not have the staffing or financial resources to meet the majority of the recommendations made by Mr. Ceperley and Mr. Garcia.



**Ms. Dionaldo (L) and Mr. Arevalo (R) toured the career center at UC-Berkeley**

Nathalie Dionaldo. The NACE conference provided opportunities for networking and attending sessions on a wide variety of career center topics. Following the conference, Mr. Arevalo visited Dr. Brian Guerrero and the career center at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Guerrero had replaced Mr. Garcia as one of UI's assigned US career center experts. During the site visit, Arevalo and Dionaldo gained insights into the operations and programs implemented by a U.S. career center and returned to the Philippines with ideas to improve existing programs and begin new ones, including the Student Success Program (SSP).

The goal of the SSP was to create a ‘winning’ mindset and improve the confidence of students. The majority of UI’s students come from a low-income background and in many cases are first-generation college students. With this background they often lack confidence in pursuing job opportunities and, once hired a consistent comment by employers is that graduates lack confidence and the ability to lead, requiring extensive training. With the introduction of SSP, UI aimed to improve the confidence of their students concurrent with implementation of other programs, such as OJT, mock interviewing, and alumni engagement.



**PHINMA UI Career Center Services**

**STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM (SSP)**

- I Want
- I Can
- I Belong

**CAREER EXPLORATION & GUIDANCE**

- Employer Information Sessions
- Faculty/Peer Career Advising
- Alumni Career Advising & Networking
- Internship and Externship Program
- Seminars and Workshops

**CAREER PLACEMENT**

- On-Campus Interview & Recruitment
- Job Matching & Referrals
- Career and Job Fairs
- Industry Linkage

**During the STRIDE project UI developed programs to ensure student success and increase career placement opportunities**



**A major program developed at UI was direct engagement and training for students, including conducting mock interviews and resume development**

organized a career center forum in Manila to convene industry representatives and career center directors from across the Philippines. Mr. Arevalo represented UI and presented on the successes seen by UI during the course of the STRIDE project. Many Philippine career centers, especially those located outside Manila, are similar to UI in the size of their student bodies, student backgrounds, available resources for career services development and local economic opportunities for students. For these reasons, Arevalo's presentation provided helpful insights to many of the attendees. Due to the growing interest in career services and the example set by UI, as well as WDI's two other partner schools, the University of Santo Tomas (UST) and the Technological Institute of the Philippines (T.I.P.), WDI, STRIDE, and the directors of the three career centers wrote and published a Roadmap for Career Services in June 2017. A chapter in the roadmap was written by Mr. Arevalo and summarized the work done by UI and the progress made during STRIDE.

During the final year of the STRIDE engagement, Mr. Arevalo and his team focused their attention on improvement of industry linkages. He also finalized the process of hiring a career center director, Ms. Kathleen Bayate, who entered her role in July 2017 as leader of the career services programs.

Following another site visit by Mr. Ceperley and Dr. Guerrero in September 2016, they observed that UI had made significant progress in the area of alumni and student engagement, having introduced several programs specifically to improve engagement with those populations. However, the career center still needed to make significant progress in the area of industry engagement and, despite the exceptional oversight of Ms. Magalang and Mr. Arevalo, as the engagement with WDI and STRIDE entered its final year they still needed to fill the position of career center director.

In early 2017, WDI and STRIDE



**Despite beginning the project without an office, staff, or significant resources, under the oversight of Mr. Arevalo UI has developed a thriving career center**



**UI's new career center director, Ms. Katt Bayate (L), was interviewed at the Regional Education Caravan to promote Industry-Academe linkages in Iloilo**

STRIDE engagement, UI had created a comprehensive approach to industry engagement, developed many new student and alumni programs, and created a strategy to sustain the center's growth over the next several years. Mr. Arevalo's role as COO had allowed him to be involved in the career center, but he was glad to see Ms. Bayate take ownership of the programs he had helped to develop and her initiative in reaching out to new industry partners. Reflecting on the experience, he noted that "We started rather slow and there were bumps along the way, but we managed to pull through. The center has been moving forward at a faster pace with Ms. Bayate's leadership and with help from WDI, Mr. Ceperley, and Dr. Guerrero."

Ms. Bayate immediately began establishing new connections with several major industries in Iloilo including construction, English tutorial, and insurance companies. Ms. Bayate also strengthened UI's connection with the Philippine Chamber of Commerce in Iloilo and the Iloilo Provincial Government-Public Employment Service Office. Another initiative launched in September 2017 was the Regional Job Placement Federation, a consortium of seven local schools led in part by the UI career center. Ms. Bayate and UI even received recognition at the regional Dept. of Labor and Employment Career Congress for their leadership in creating the Federation.

As he recalled the two years of his work with the career center, Mr. Arevalo was glad to see that it had grown so quickly. By the final months of the