

Competitive Advantage of the University of the Assumption

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify the competitive advantages of the University of the Assumption's undergraduate studies in terms of its number of years in operation, institutional recognition, programs offered, student population, board exam performance, tuition fees, and facilities. The descriptive research has participants from five selected HEIs in Pampanga. The data obtained in this study were gathered from the official websites of the HEIs. Interviews with the HEIs' personnel were also conducted. The data in this research were treated using ranking, frequency and percentage distribution. These tools were employed in summarizing data on the HEIs' profile. Based on the results among the five HEIs, UA ranks second in terms of the number of years in operation, second most expensive tuition fees, but is the only school that offers the program of Bachelor of Secondary Education, major in Values Education with Religious Education. It is recommended that the UA's marketing and promotional plan and programs be reviewed. During school campaigns, UA ambassadors may emphasize the school's gymnasium, hotel dormitory, swimming pool, and auditorium. There is a need for the school to formulate specific strategies on how to retain current students especially those who do not pass the retention policy of their programs. It is highly recommended that the colleges/schools which are underperforming in the board exams review their curricular offerings and programs again and identify the cause for low board exam passing rate.

Key words: Competitive advantage, organization

INTRODUCTION

The valuation of the competitiveness of an organization aims to illustrate its competitive position associated to the other competitors in the field where it functions. Similarly, it is believed that competitiveness is based on an analysis of the organization

itself, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses in order to determine its significant advantages over the competitors (Dimitrova & Dimitrova , 2017).

Most organizations are involved in some form of competition including the higher education institutions. This competition brings consequences for all the stakeholders of the HEIs. Students for instance, have more options as to where to pursue higher education and HEIs already feel the increase in competition. This highly competitive nature of the higher education environment according to Meinardes, Tontini and Ferreira (2011), demands a more professional and entrepreneurial management of the HEIs.

Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter cited the three primary ways companies achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. These are cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. If Porter's general model is employed to the field of education, it can be considered that the competitive advantages of HEI depend on the production factors, the demand for educational services, the presence of related and complementary services, and a chosen sustainable strategy. Production factors include the presence of highly qualified teaching staff, modern materials and technical facilities. Scientific research, consultancy, and marketing management comprise the presence of related and complementary activities. Sustainable strategies are the company's strengths that make it difficult for competitors to neutralize the competitive advantage. Similarly, competitive advantage in higher education gives the HEI the edge over its counterparts (Porter,1985).

There are certain number of educational institutions like the HEIs that operate on the principles of good operational management with the goal of not only achieving organizational efficiency and maximum profit but also with the higher mission of providing quality education for its clients. In order to achieve this, a

strong connection among resources, territory, and stakeholders is elemental (Mainardes, Tontini, & Ferreira, 2011). The authors went on to say that HEIs themselves must change and must become professionally managed entrepreneurial organizations and involve students and staff in development activities.

Kalenuk and Dyakon (2016) posited that the competitive advantage of the higher education system are such characteristics and properties that allow it to fulfil its general functions, to act as an effective component of economy , and to obtain high positions in rankings and increase its share on the specific market.

In their study, Tia, Dwi, Imas and Yunizar (2016) stressed that the gap between the expected value of service with the value received by the students influence the competitive advantage in educational institutions. Thus, improvement of service quality in school requires human resources and the availability of support systems.

Meanwhile, Schram (2014) made mention that today, universities everywhere are transforming from cozy community of scholars model into more complex stakeholder organization where accountability and transparency are increasingly important. Leaders with sufficient academic credibility and strong executive qualities, and in particular, strong communication and management skills, are required for this type of universities. Improving on strategic goals will divert attention from phony activities and reduce pointless conflicts.

The complexity of the educational environment stipulates the variety of situations in which managers make strategic decisions aimed at higher school improvement and the organization's quality enhancement (Stukalina,2010). According to Kettunen (2008), in the context of quality assurance, managers employ a series of

integrated management procedures for achieving their strategic objectives. In the process of managing school improvement, various initiatives can be involved: organizational change philosophies including Total Quality Management and different management tools that are suitable for particular circumstances. Hence, from a holistic point of view, educational management needs several perspectives to be considered in the context of supporting continuous quality enhancement of the educational environment (Stukalina, 2010).

Today, there is no sector where competition has not grown significantly including the higher education sector (Levy, 2006 as cited by Mainardes, Tontini, & Ferreira, 2011). The same author argued that HEI's markets behave like entrepreneurial businesses. In order to survive market competition, HEIs need to turn back to the identification of their competitive advantages and construct strategies based on these identified advantages.

According to the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), a growing number of private colleges and universities are experiencing a decline in their enrolment due to the implementation of the Free Higher Education. Apparently, a high number of private colleges and universities experience a low enrolment turnout as well as migration of their students to the nearest competing state university.

Purpose and Objectives

This study sought to identify the competitive advantages of the University of the Assumption's undergraduate studies in terms of its number of years in operation, institutional recognition, programs offered, student population, board exam performance, tuition fees, and facilities.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study consist of five selected HEIs in Pampanga namely, University of the Assumption (UA), Don Honorio Ventura State University (DHVSU), Our Lady of Fatima University Pampanga (OLFU), Colegio de Sebastian (CDS), and City College of San Fernando Pampanga (CCSFP).

Data Gathering Procedure

The data obtained in this study were gathered from the official websites of the HEIs. Interviews with the HEIs' personnel were also conducted.

Data Analysis

Data in this research were treated using the ranking, frequency and percentage distribution. These tools were employed in summarizing data on the HEIs' profile.

Scope and Limitation

This study is aimed at describing the competitive advantages of the University of the Assumption's undergraduate studies. Five schools in Pampanga are covered in the study. The findings are limited to the data gathered in their official websites and the responses provided by the participants who were willing to be interviewed. Autonomous universities are not included in the study.

RESULTS

1. Year of Establishment

Table 1. *Year of Establishment and Number of Years in Operation*

	UA	DHVSU	OLFU	CCSFP	CDS
Year of Establishment	1963	1861	2015	2009	2011
Number of Years in Operation	57	159	5	11	9

Table 1 shows that DHVSU is the oldest among the five respondents and has been operating for more than one and a half century. University of the Assumption follows with almost six decades in age while the rest are five to eleven years in operation yet.

Furthermore, the data show that the first two HEIs are relatively “old” institutions. It may be implied that their university status may be attributed to time and experience. These HEIs have already surmounted several government administrations and economic crisis which implies that they have already developed and implemented several time-tested tools in monitoring their performance as educational institutions.

2. Certification and Accreditation

Table 2. *Certification and Accrediting Agency*

UA	DHVSU	OLFU	CCSFP	CDS
ISO 9001:2015	ISO 9001:2015	ISO 9001:2015	-----	-----
PAASCU	AACCUP	PACUCOA	-----	-----

Table 2 illustrates that UA, DHVSU, and OLFU obtained the ISO 9001:2015 certification. ISO 9001:2015 is a formal certification

of quality standards indicating a firm has passed a rigorous audit to confirm that its major processes have been documented and everyone associated with those processes understands correct procedures, and that people routinely follow these procedures (Swink, 2017).

The same HEIs submit some of their programs to accreditation. UA is accredited by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), DHVSU went through accreditation by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP) while OLFU is accredited by the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCA). This process of accreditation promotes ongoing self-evaluation and continuous improvement and provides an effective system for accountability. It also enhances the school's national reputation and provides stakeholders the assurance that the school or program has been evaluated and has met accepted standards.

3. Programs Offered

Table 3. *Schools/Colleges and Programs*

	UA	DHVSU	OLFU	CCSFP	CDS
Number of Schools and Colleges	7	8	11	3	4
Number of Programs	19	30	22	4	9

Table 3 reveals that DHVSU has the most number of course offerings although it ranks second to its number of colleges. It has eight colleges namely, College of Engineering and Architecture, College of Business Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, College of Hospitality Management, College of Social Science and Philosophy, College of Education, College of Computing Studies, and College of Industrial Technology. The roster of thirty programs include BS in Architecture, BS in Civil Engineering, BS in

Mechanical Engineering, BS in Electrical Engineering, BS in Electronics Engineering, BS in Industrial Engineering, BS in Business Administration major in Business Economics and Economics, BS in Accountancy, BS in Accounting Information Systems, Bachelor in Public Administration, BS in Environmental Science, BS in Biology, BS in Hotel and Restaurant Management, BS in Hospitality Management, BS in Tourism Management, BS in Social Work, BS in Psychology, BS in Sociology, Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Math, Filipino and Science, Bachelor in Physical Education, Bachelor of Technical and Livelihood Education, Bachelor of Technical-Vocational Teacher Education major in Food and Service Management or Garments, Fashion and Technology, BS in Information Technology, BS in Computer Science, BS in Computer Engineering, BS in Information Systems, Associate in Computer Technology, and BS in Industrial Technology.

OLFU Pampanga ranks highest in the number of colleges while second in the number of course offerings. It is composed of eleven colleges that include the College of Business and Accountancy, College of Tourism, Hospitality and Culinary, College of Teacher Education, College of Medical and Health Care, College of Information Technology, Computer Science and Programming, College of Engineering, College of Social Science, College of Communication and Information Science, and College of Science. The school's twenty-two programs comprise the following: BS in Accountancy, BS in Accounting Information Systems, BS Business Administration in Banking and Finance, BS Business Administration in Marketing Management, BS Business Administration in Operations Management, BS in Culinary Management, BS in International Hospitality Management with specialization in Hotel Administration and Cruise Line Operations, BS in International Hospitality Management with specialization in Restaurant and Fastfood Chain, BS in International Tourism Management with

specialization in Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions, BS in International Tourism Management with specialization in Travel, and Tour Operations, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English, Filipino, and General Science, BS in Medical Technology, BS in Nursing, BS in Pharmacy, BS in Physical Therapy, BS in Computer Science, BS in Information Technology, BS in Criminology, BS in Psychology, BS in Civil Engineering, AB in Communication Arts, and BS in Environmental Science.

UA is third with seven schools/colleges and nineteen programs. Its academic pillars constitute the College of Nursing and Pharmacy, College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, School of Business and Public Administration, College of Accountancy, School of Arts and Sciences, School of Education, College of Information Technology, Computing and Library Science, and College of Engineering and Architecture. The list of programs include BS in Nursing, BS in Pharmacy, BS in Hospitality Management, BS in Tourism Management, BS in Marketing Management, BS in Operations Management, BS in Accountancy, BS in Psychology, AB Communication, Bachelor in Human Services, Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English / Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Values Education with Religious Education, Bachelor of Physical Education, BS in Information Technology, BS Bachelor of Library and Information Science, BS in Industrial Engineering, BS in Civil Engineering, BS in Computer Engineering and BS in Architecture.

Fourth among the schools is CDS with four schools/colleges and nine program offerings. Under the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management are the programs BS in Hospitality Management and BS in Tourism Management. Business Administration offers the programs BS in Accountancy, BS in

Accounting Technology, and BS in Business Administration. BS in Civil Engineering, BS in Computer Engineering, and BS in Electronics Engineering are under the School of Engineering while BS Psychology is the sole program under the School of Psychology.

CCSFP has the least number of schools/colleges and programs. The courses being offered by the city college are Bachelor of Elementary Education major in General Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Biology, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Mathematics, BS in Business Administration major in Financial Management, BS in Business Administration major in Marketing Management, and BS in Business Administration major in Information Technology.

4. Student Population

Table 4. *Student Population as of March 2020*

	UA	DHVSU	OLFU	CCSFP	CDS
Student Population	1575	27000+	4511	444	727
Market Share (%)	4.6	78.82	13.17	1.3	2.12

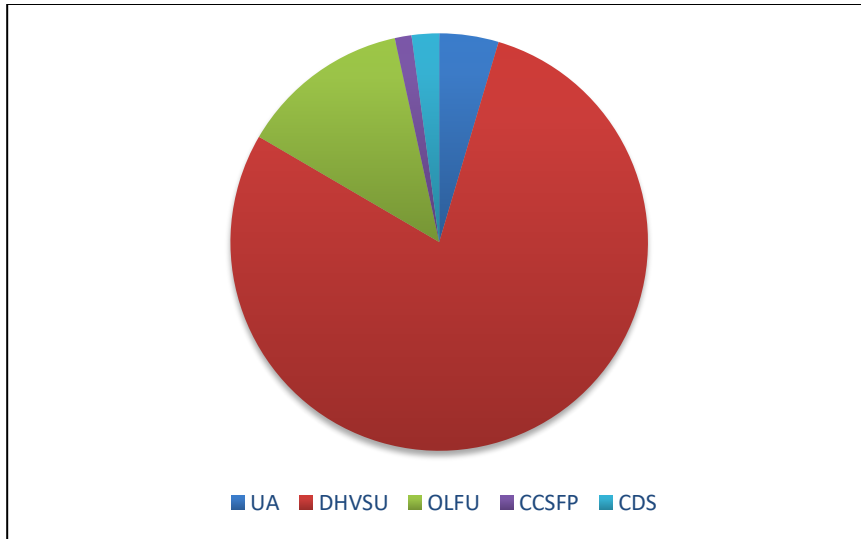


Figure 1. Student Population

It is evident based on the data provided in Table 4 and Figure 1 that DHVSU towers above the other schools in the level of student population with more than twenty seven thousand enrolees and a whopping market share of 78.82%. OLFU ranks second with 13.17% market share and four thousand five hundred eleven enrolees. With a market share of 4.6% and total enrolees of 1575, UA ranks third. CDS is fourth with seven hundred twenty seven enrolees and 2.12% market share. CCSFP has the least market share of 1.3% and four hundred forty four students in the last term.

5. Board Exam Performance

The board exam performance of eight programs in UA from 2015 to 2019 is shown on the tables below. A graphical representation of the passing rate and the corresponding national passing rate is illustrated beside each table. The respective passing rates are not compared to other schools because most of them have just started offering the same programs and do not have

board takers yet. Hence, UA's board passing rates are compared to the national passing rates instead.

Table 5.1 BS Nursing Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

BS NURSING				
Year	PASSING RATE (JUN)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (JUN)	PASSING RATE (NOV)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (NOV)
2015	75.00%	54.26%	50.00%	49.26%
2016	62.50%	43.60%	64.29%	47.73%
2017	60.00%	34.74%	50.00%	45.65%
2018	88.89%	43.82%		
2019	95.24%	52.20%	50.00%	55.20%

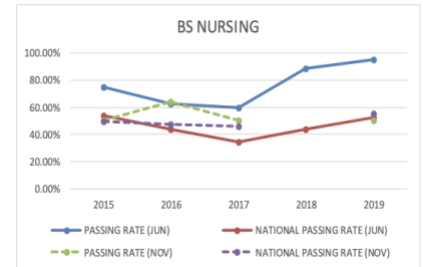


Table 5.1 shows that BS Nursing's board exam passing rate exceeded the national passing rate from June 2015 to June 2019. During this period, a passer emerged as topnotcher in the exam. However, there were no board exam takers in November 2018 and in November 2019, BS Nursing board exam performance logged 5% below the national passing rate. PRC records show that repeaters caused the general passing rate to drastically fall.

Table 5.2 BS Accountancy Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

BS ACCOUNTANCY				
Year	PASSING RATE (MAY)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (MAY)	PASSING RATE (OCT)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (OCT)
2015	32.14%	35.78%	37.50%	41.06%
2016	61.54%	42.91%	40.20%	36.48%
2017	35.09%	35.14%	27.42%	30.45%
2018	22.73%	28.92%	10.64%	25.19%
2019	17.07%	16.47%	10.94%	14.32%

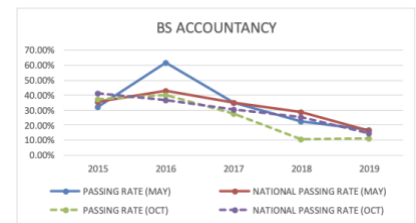
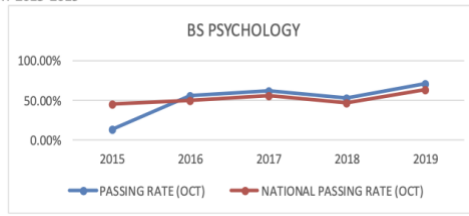


Table 5.2 presents that in 2015, 2017, 2018 and October 2019, BS Accountancy did not reach the national passing rate. However, in June 2016, October 2016 and June 2019, the passing rate exceeded the national passing rate.

Table 5.3 BS Psychology Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

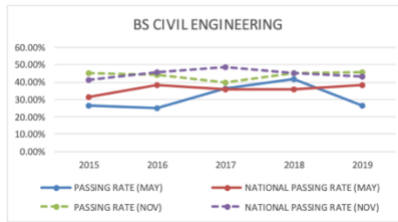
BS PSYCHOLOGY		
	PASSING RATE (OCT)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (OCT)
2015	14.29%	46.15%
2016	56.10%	50.46%
2017	62.96%	56.97%
2018	52.63%	47.73%
2019	72.00%	63.73%



Although unsuccessful in 2015, BS Psychology’s board exam passing rate consistently bested the national passing rate in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. In 2016, it was able to produce a board toptotcher.

Table 5.4 BS Civil Engineering Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

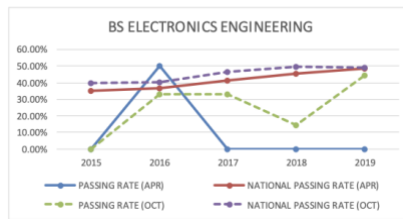
BS CIVIL ENGINEERING				
Year	PASSING RATE (MAY)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (MAY)	PASSING RATE (NOV)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (NOV)
2015	26.67%	31.57%	45.45%	41.50%
2016	25.00%	38.17%	44.44%	45.90%
2017	36.36%	35.92%	40.00%	48.81%
2018	41.67%	36.03%	45.45%	45.11%
2019	26.67%	38.25%	45.83%	43.18%



In all the ten semesters covered in the study, the Civil Engineering Board exam results went above the national passing rate five times. These are in November 2015, May 2017, May 2018, November 2018, and November 2019.

Table 5.5 BSElect.Engineering Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

BS ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING				
Year	PASSING RATE (APR)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (APR)	PASSING RATE (OCT)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (OCT)
2015	0.00%	34.95%	0.00%	39.94%
2016	50.00%	36.95%	33.33%	40.36%
2017	0.00%	41.27%	33.33%	46.72%
2018	0.00%	45.36%	14.29%	49.49%
2019	0.00%	48.92%	44.44%	49.43%



BS Electronics Engineering attained a board passing performance higher than the national passing rate in April 2016. However, it was not able to reach the national passing rate in October 2016, October 2017, October 2018, and October 2019. In

April 2015, October 2015, April 2017, April 2018, April 2019, none of its takers passed the board exam.

Table 5.6 BS Architecture Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

BS ARCHITECTURE				
Year	PASSING RATE (JAN)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (JAN)	PASSING RATE (JUN)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (JUN)
2015	40.00%	60.71%	33.33%	61.15%
2016	37.50%	55.66%	50.00%	55.89%
2017	20.00%	57.62%	36.84%	55.62%
2018	44.44%	57.60%	35.71%	55.96%
2019	21.05%	56.28%	48.15%	66.33%

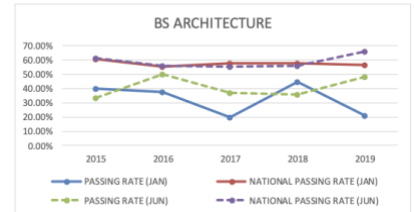


Table 5.6 reveals that the BS Architecture board performance did not reach the national passing rate from 2015 – 2019.

Table 5.7 Elem Education Board Exam Performance from AY 2015-2019

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION				
Year	PASSING RATE (MAR)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (MAR)	PASSING RATE (SEP)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (SEP)
2015	17.65%	27.42%	44.83%	31.36%
2016	33.33%	28.39%	46.43%	30.18%
2017	7.14%	10.39%	27.59%	26.33%
2018	33.33%	23.62%	32.00%	20.29%
2019	43.75%	27.29%	29.03%	31.34%

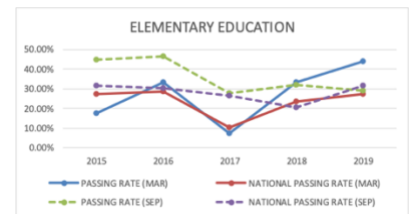
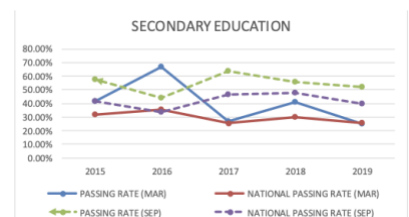


Table 5.7 shows that the Bachelor of Elementary Education achieved a passing rate higher than the national passing rate in the following examination dates: September 2015, March 2016, September 2016, September 2017, March 2018, September 2018, and March 2019.

SECONDARY EDUCATION				
Year	PASSING RATE (MAR)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (MAR)	PASSING RATE (SEP)	NATIONAL PASSING RATE (SEP)
2015	41.86%	31.64%	57.41%	41.75%
2016	66.67%	35.43%	43.94%	33.78%
2017	26.79%	25.46%	63.77%	46.37%
2018	41.30%	29.91%	55.56%	48.03%
2019	25.00%	25.95%	51.90%	39.69%



From March 2015 to September 2018, the Bachelor of Secondary Education board performance rate consistently

achieved a score higher than the national passing rate. Although it fell short of .95% to be at par with the national passing rate in March 2019, it soared high again in September 2019.

6. Tuition Fees

Table 6. *Tuition Fees (per semester)*

UA	DHVSU	OLFU	CCSFP	CDS
28,000 - 37,000 (except BSN and BSP)	Free	40,000 – 44,000	Free	22,000 – 25,000 (except medical courses)

Data in Table 4 show that OLFU charges the highest tuition fee among the five schools, followed by UA, and then CDS. However, DHVSU and CCSFP do not charge any fees to their students because of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act which is also known as the Republic Act 10931. This law institutionalizes free tuition and exemption from other fees in state universities and colleges (SUCs), local universities and colleges (LUCs) in the Philippines.

7. Facilities

Table 7. *School Facilities*

	GYMNASIUM	HOTEL DORMITORY	SWIMMING POOL	AUDITORIUM
UA	√	√	√	√
DHVSU	√	√	X	X
OLFU	X	X	X	X
CCSFP	X	X	X	√
CDS	√	X	X	X

Table 7 indicates that UA is the only school that has all the following facilities: gymnasium, hotel dormitory, swimming pool,

and auditorium. DHVSU retains a gymnasium and its recently constructed hotel dormitory. CCSFP maintains an auditorium while CDS keeps an auditorium. OLFU does not have any of the cited facilities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The HEIs' operations range from 5 to 159 years. UA is 57 years old and ranks second in terms of the number of years in operation. This implies that UA has already developed and implemented several time-tested tools in monitoring the performance of their various programs, projects and activities.
2. UA submits to accreditation and certification signifying its fervent commitment to promote endless self-evaluation and provides an effective system for accountability.
3. UA is the only school that offers the program Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Values Education with Religious Education. This strongly indicates the alignment between UA and its mission where it commits itself to the integral development of Catholic leaders through academic excellence, Christian formation, and community service.
4. Among the five schools, UA has the second most expensive tuition fees.
5. BS Nursing, BS Psychology, and Bachelor of Secondary Education scored the highest frequency of board passing rate that is above the national passing rate from academic year 2015-2019.

6. UA is the only school that is endowed with gymnasium, hotel dormitory, swimming pool, and auditorium.

Upon considering the aforementioned, it is indisputable that UA's competitive advantage is attributable to its number of years in operation, institutional recognition, programs aligned to its mission and performing well in board exams (BS Nursing, BS Psychology, Bachelor of Secondary Education), and facilities.

Recommendation

In light of the conclusions derived from the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. With the declining enrolment in UA, it is recommended that its marketing and promotional plan and programs be reviewed. During school campaigns, UA ambassadors may emphasize the school's gymnasium, hotel dormitory, swimming pool, and auditorium.
2. There is a need for the school to formulate specific strategies on how to retain current students especially those who do not pass the retention policy of their programs.
3. It is highly recommended that the colleges/schools which are underperforming in the board exams review their curricular offerings and programs again and identify the cause for low board exam passing rate.
4. UA may consider offering new programs (and short programs that are highly demanded) that will enable it to earn a greater market share.
5. Other HEIs may use this study to conduct research on the competitive advantage of their institution.

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*International Journal of Economics, Commerce, and
Management, Vol.IV.*