

Relationships Between the School of Economics Faculty of the Universidad Nacional De La Patagonia San Juan Bosco and Alumni

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Abstract: The present paper developed from an analysis done in the research project “Actors and Factors in the microenvironment of the Esquel delegation, at the School of Economy Faculty of the Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia San Juan Bosco.

The microenvironment formed by the surrounding forces that affect the capacity of the organization, recognizes “the market”, among its actors, which is composed of real and potential product consumers. Applying this theory to the educational environment in this institution and considering as products the undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate alumni, graduates are recognized as one of the main groups of actors in the microenvironment.

If we were to analyse bond degrees from Marketing, we think that we are living in a symbolic world, rather than physical, with perceptions and sensations, supported by our subconscious. Many thinkers have written about the existence of psychological forces which escape objectivity and reality about the way of thinking and the way of perceiving things. The latter has to do with life and the relationship with institutions and products.

If graduates, as social actors of importance to the microenvironment of the faculty, encounter needs and therefore lack of assistance, this situation has to be analyzed and assessed in order to act in accordance, offering a meaningful service so as to match those needs.

Key words: marketing; university education; social representations; information

JEL codes: I2, M31

1. Introduction

The present paper developed from an analysis done in the research project “Actors and Factors in the microenvironment of the Esquel delegation, at the School of Economy, Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia San Juan Bosco.

The microenvironment formed by the surrounding forces that affect the capacity of the organization, recognizes “the market”, among its actors, which is composed of real and potential product consumers. Applying this theory to the educational environment in this institution and considering as products the undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate alumni, graduates are recognized as one of the main groups of actors in the

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microenvironment.

In addition, Kotler and Armstrong (2008) explain that the decision process of a customer is divided into five stages: need recognition, search for information, evaluation of alternatives, buying decision, post-buying/purchase behaviour.

Adapting this generalization to the environment of higher education and focusing on the last stage described by the authors, the students who have graduated at this institution, the graduates, belong to this group.

The impact analysis of this experience, to determine the value of the product, the level of satisfaction and the position the institution has achieved, after offering its academic service, result essential to complete the analysis of the microenvironment and to establish lifelong relationships. It is remarkable that in this case the bonds to be built have got some peculiarities not visible in organizations of commercial characteristics.

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Based on what has been expressed above, the objectives of this work are:

- Identify the Esquel Faculty alumni.
- Determine if graduates have established any kind of bond with their faculty after graduation.
- Identify the bonds of interest for the segment.
- Considering no explicit bonds, identify the reasons for absence of relationships.

2. Theoretical Framework

Higher education institutions are concerned in developing an educational service to fulfill the requirements and demands of today's society and to guarantee quality and pertinence in education (Lopez Vazquez et al., 2010).

Nandof (2007, p. 29) supports that pertinence lacks a legitimate and unique definition even so it is useful to evaluate the role and performance that an institution of higher education develops in its social context.

Three meanings are accepted:

- A reductionist view: university response to the economic field and employment demands.
- Amplified social pertinence: the institution responds to the same employment and economic market demands but in a limited way, recognizing that the social, cultural and political environments can also be considered.
- Comprehensive Trend: which not only includes the latter but also supports a critical rationale from which it is possible to build new alternatives of thought and action.

Establishing relationships between educational institutions and their graduates is one of the strategies which allows them to steer institutional actions.

Alumni can become an important feedback source for academic and curricular reflection from their working scenarios and difficulties encountered, the response capacity from their personal and professional competence, facing the demands of the environment and from the areas and topics of which it would be possible to offer

in-service and advanced training.

The real university challenge towards its alumni is to achieve effective spaces of participation to allow the university to know the real impact of its actions on society and in consequence implement the necessary adjustments to improve community insertion (Lopez Vazquez et al., 2010).

Marketing studies “why people and institutions exchange goods, services or ideas” and it analyzes how these exchanges are and how they ought to be stimulated for them to be mutually satisfactory and foster stable and long-lasting relationships (Santesmases, 2004).

In order to prove what has been stated above, there was a survey administered to graduates of the School of Economy from the Esquel branch, of the Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia San Juan Bosco as members of the institution they can provide ideas, opinions and information to sustain the relationships in time and provide for the permanent improvement of the institution processes.

3. Methodology

The School of Economics as an educational institution is concerned with the level of satisfaction of its alumni, their bonding degree with the institution and the requirements to foster those bonds.

The School of Economics graduates, from the Esquel branch, constitute the microenvironment selected as the study group for this work.

The team has defined the variables to investigate, choosing as a starting point the segments previously analysed for the “market group”. This scheme offers the possibility for a future comparative analysis within those segments.

The reports from potential consumers (students attending the last year at high school) and present students attending careers and postgraduate careers in this faculty.

The instrument designed analyses the graduates profile, the positioning of the institution and of other educational institutions, the positioning of the careers, the competence required for each professional, employment factor and the relationship the graduate holds with the faculty.

After the stage of elaboration of the self-administered interview concluded, information on the alumni was gathered.

First, the communication with this segment was done via e-mail, setting a month deadline for submitting answers. This method proved null. In consequence a new method was implemented by personally approaching the population under study: personal contact, among working peers, and networks among graduates. This proved a more effective means of communication. This second survey was made during the second and third week of August 2017, some of them were via e-mail and others according to the proximity and convenience of the respondent. Also, delegate teachers of the Esquel Faculty branch were interviewed about the relationship of the School of Economy with its alumni.

4. Results

The amount of degrees according to the register is 88 over 66 graduates, because some have double degree, out of which 33 answers were obtained, representing 50% of the register belonging to that university branch; 67% are female and 33% male (see Figure 1), concentrating a 75% between the age range of 30-49 year olds (Figure 2).

**Relationships Between the School of Economics Faculty of the Universidad Nacional De La Patagonia
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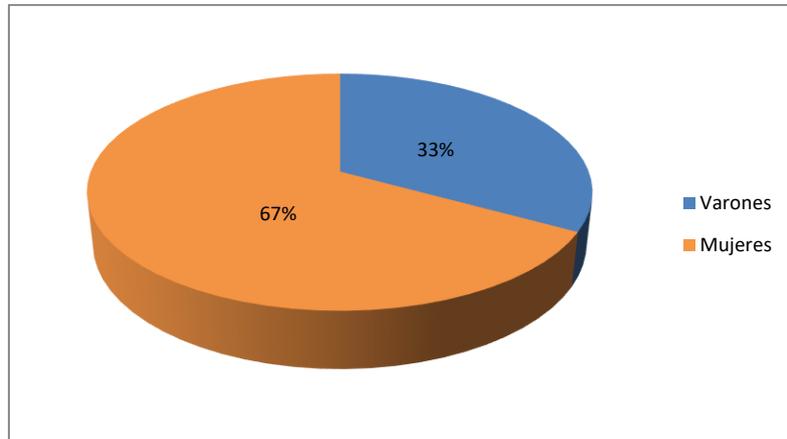


Figure 1 Alumni Distribution According to Gender

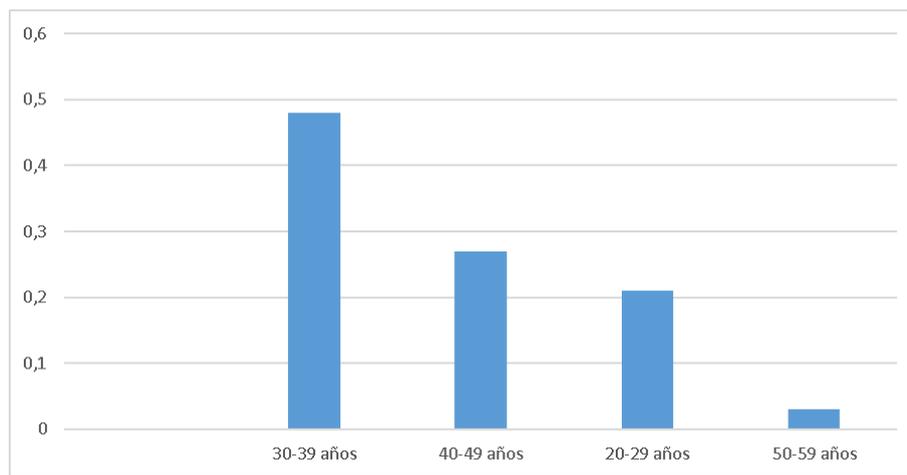


Figure 2 Alumni Age Range

According to the place of residence of this segment of people interviewed, it is observed in graph N° 3 that a 67 % lives in the city of Esquel, 3% in Trevelin, 9% in Epuyén, 9% are from the Province of Rio Negro (6% live in El Bolsón, and 3% in Bariloche). The 12% recorded as “Other” are from El Hoyo, Rawson and Comodoro Rivadavia.

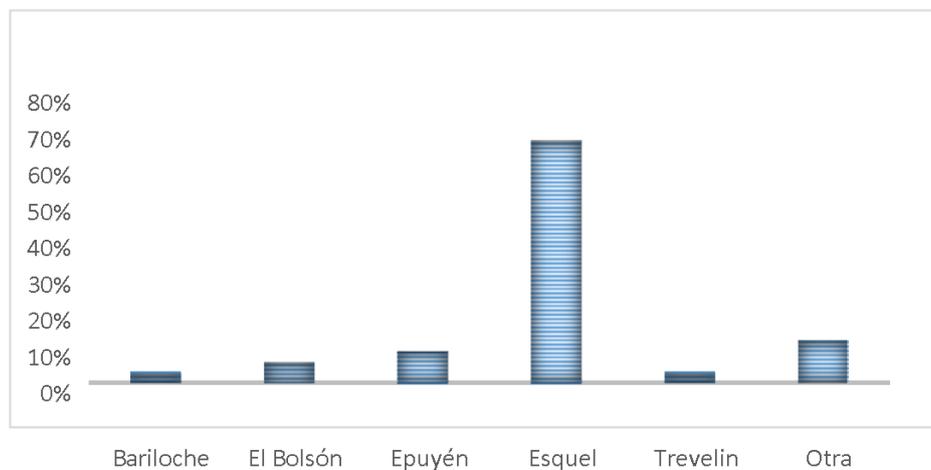


Figure 3 Origin of Alumni According to Hometown

Having asked about what careers they studied, most of them were graduates (61%), followed by the pregraduates (36%) and a minority with a postgraduate degree (3%) (see Figure 4).

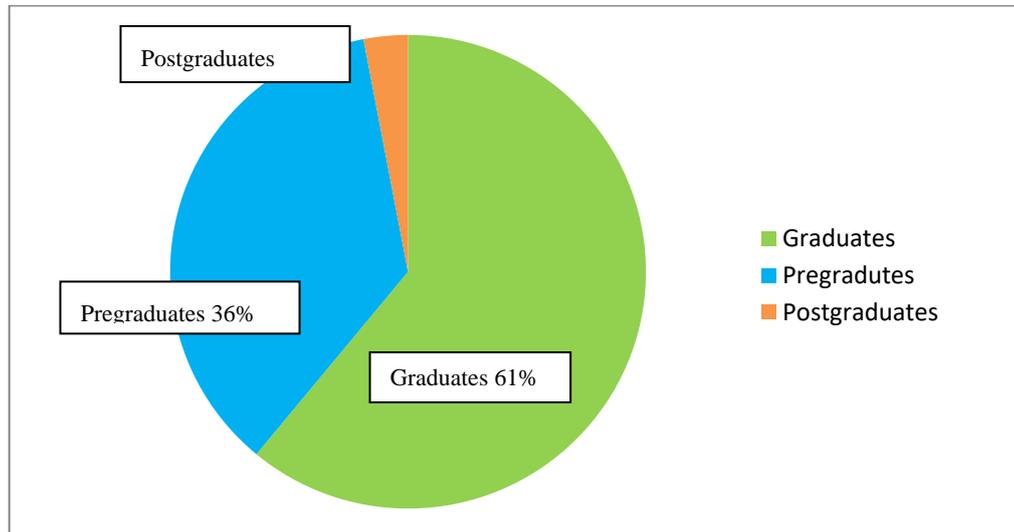


Figure 4 Alumni Distribution According to Degrees

The respondents were consulted if after graduation they had established any relationship with their former School of Economy Faculty (Figure 5), to what a 56% answered affirmatively. When asked about the reasons of that connection, most of them said it was related to teaching activities or non teaching. The following reason in order of importance, responds to the graduates who continue with their studies. Isolated reasons were about some bonds they maintain from other organizations where they are working.

Among the answers provided by the 44% who did not have a relationship with the pos graduation faculty, the majority supported this fact due to a lack of time, others due to a lack of interest, no reasons for it or that they got no answer when wanting to participate. Lastly, others supported this absence of links due to the distance between their hometown and the Faculty facilities.

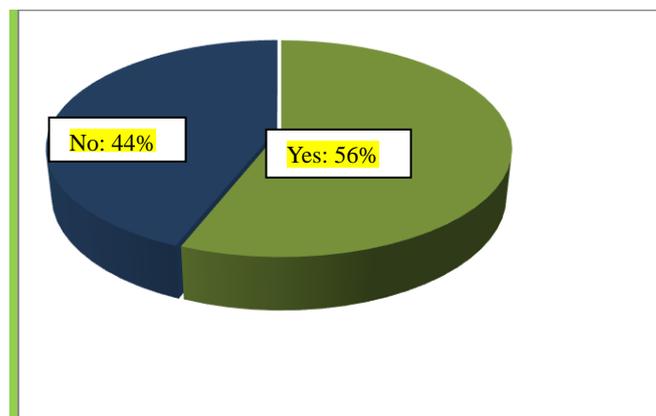


Figure 5 Relationship with the School of Economy and Its Graduates

When asked if they are interested in doing any activity which connects with the University, such as research, academic actions or university extension, a 67% of the respondents chose the academic dimension, a 30% research and a 30% extension (Figures 6-8).

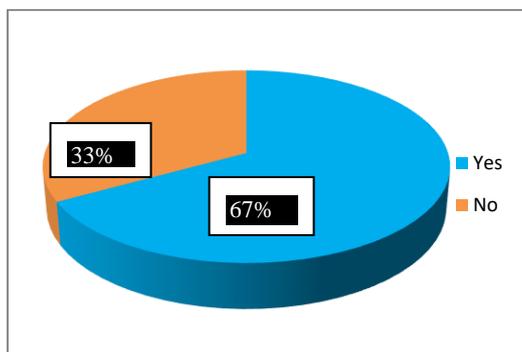


Figure 6 Alumni interested in relationships in the academic dimension

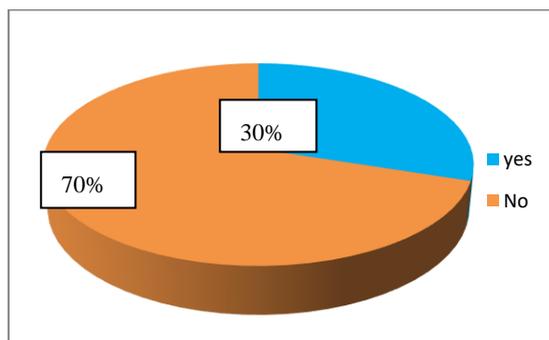


Figure 7 Alumni Interested in the Research Dimension

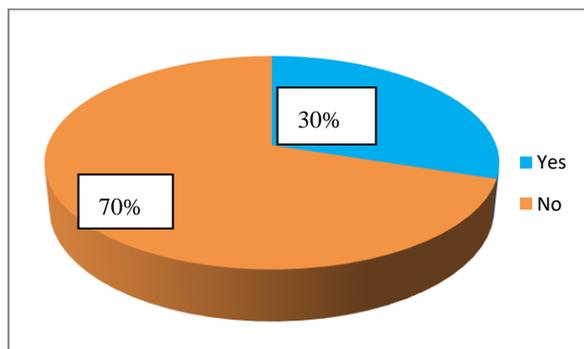


Figure 8 Alumni Interested in the Extension Dimension

When consulting graduates if they are working or not, the 100% answered they were. The places where they work are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Areas Where Graduates Work, Expressed in Absolute and Relative Frequencies (AF/RF)

| | AF | RF |
|------------------|----|--------|
| Independent | 11 | 0.3333 |
| Teaching | 9 | 0.2727 |
| Business | 3 | 0.0909 |
| Public Employee | 18 | 0.5455 |
| Private Employee | 5 | 0.1515 |
| Public official | 4 | 0.1212 |
| Other | 1 | 0.0303 |
| | 51 | 1.5455 |

The results indicate that each interviewee works in more than one professional area (see Table 2) and that “public employees” and “independent professionals” are the main occupations.

Table 2 Number of Areas Where the Profession Is Developed

| | AF | RF |
|---------|----|------|
| 3 areas | 3 | 0.09 |
| 2 areas | 12 | 0.36 |
| 1 area | 18 | 0.55 |
| | 33 | 1 |

As indicated in the table above, 55% develop in a professional area and a 45% in more than one area.

At the end of the interview, an open answer question was included, to allow the respondents to widen their opinion on the relationship they had with the faculty. Below are some of the quoted answers.

“I am a teacher at the university and I am interested in training in order to update concepts and keep updated with the daily changes which occur in our profession. Moreover I would like to look into research which at the same time could replace teaching...”

“I had the luck of being part of the School of Economics in different fields, except teaching. I have always been welcomed. It is a great human group: students, teachers, non teaching staff, etc.. The quality in education and commitment are remarkable. Nowadays, I would like to build new bonds from the area of research.”

“I would like to teach.”

“My bond with the School of Economy is related with permanent support, upgrading with my work as high school teacher.”

“I would like to receive updating training courses, it would be a way of promoting alumni permanent education.”

“The School of Economy should have a monthly meeting venue between the academy and the citizens: open, plural and democratic.”

“It would be very important that the university could facilitate technical graduates employability.”

“I feel I belong to the Faculty and I work to foster its growth!”

“The School of Economy is a faculty with a very good and innovative academic level, always proposing courses, posgraduate courses, research and extension projects to integrate teachers and graduates.”

“I think that the School of Economy is a unique opportunity in reach of those who want to broaden knowledge and grow intellectually, all for free. I have a strong affection towards my university which gave me and two of my sisters the opportunity of graduating here and allowing us to become who we are. I would have liked to have seen it grow year by year, however very little funds have been invested in it.”

“A call for proposals should exist to support altogether, the value and outreach of our degree.”

“As a student I am forever thankful”

“An essential issue is student retention, since high education consists of an experience which changes every person who graduates from high school and faces adulthood.”

“I got no answer to my offer to cooperate in faculty subjects. I hold an MBA and as a graduate I wanted to cooperate as I made a great effort and worked with high reputation companies. I never got any kind of information on activities developed in the faculty, all the news I got it through friends and acquaintances.”

When consulting teachers, who worked as Faculty Delegates, in the Esquel branch of the Universidad Nacional de La Patagonia San Juan Bosco, if the School of Economics keeps bonds with its alumni, they answered that it did not, even if it were an essential condition. They supported that once graduates finish their studies they become employed and their only bonds occur when postgraduate courses are offered.

They mentioned that the position the faculty occupies in society is of an “educational service provider” and “the relationship is based on to those values that the faculty has”. “Research and extension are quite isolated”.

5. Conclusions

From the sample considered, 67% of graduates are female, 45% between 30 and 39 year olds, who live in Esquel and its surrounding areas (88%) which highlights the importance of the faculty for the local and regional residents. 97% are undegradate and pregraduates matching the faculty offer, as it does not offer regular postgraduate careers.

The gap between alumni who have had a relationship with the institution is not very meaningful (yes: 56% -no: 44%). A deeper analysis on which have been the reasons for connecting is pending and therefore provide assistance to their demands. Despite that, postgraduate courses can be an opportunity to foster links with the institution among this segment, it must be considered that only a 3% has attended a postgraduate degree. This should not be the only option, while there are other motivational issues to build bonds through activities from different dimensions.

Among the reasons that the faculty does not develop bonds are the existing distance, between the towns and the location of the institution; the participation in research and extension projects could be a solution for those people living away from the city and want to keep a relationship with the university.

It is remarkable that the interest in bonding is mainly academic (70%) while the remaining 30% are interested in research and extension. It is also notorious that the 100% are working and 9 of them are teachers.

Considering former delegates opinions it is noticed that they support that the School of Economics does not sustain long lasting bonds with its alumni, however they remark the values it transmits. On the other hand graduates value the efforts made to offer a permanent updated training which also builds a link with the faculty.

Taking into account Nairdof (2007) contributions on University relevance, the School of Economics in the Esquel branch, is closer to the category defined as “amplified social pertinence” which implies that the institution responds to employment and economic demands in a limited way, acknowledging that the social, cultural and political fields should also be considered.

The results obtained provide facts to continue working in order to better the relationship with this group, as members of the School of Economics microenvironment in the Esquel area.

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