

EDITORIAL

Undergraduate Research Thesis: Is it really a Necessity or an Unnecessary Burden?

The prevailing tradition among Higher Educational Institution (HEI) in the Philippines offering undergraduate degrees is to require a research output, in the form of a full thesis, prior to graduation. The thesis is unceremoniously elevated from a mere requirement for a course in introduction to research to a pre-requisite for graduation instead. This tradition is out-dated and completely unnecessary.

There actually exist no law or administrative orders which explicitly stipulate the need for a full-blown paper to be produced prior to the completion of an undergraduate degree in the Philippines. This practice seems to stem on the premise that production of a completed research paper equates to the mastery and competence in doing a full-blown research and that producing a research output is the essential outcome of an undergraduate degree. These assumptions are flawed.

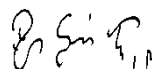
The ultimate goal of the undergraduate research course is appreciating the process of research, not knowledge production. The emphasis should be to develop the basic skills of the undergraduate students such as technical writing, proper citation, and formatting. Sifting thru and making sense of what is already available in the literature and how this knowledge translates into their professional practice should be the priority and not the production of new disciplinary wisdom. It seems that some educators have placed too much emphasis on the intended output rather than the process needed to produce that output. There are a number of cases where undergraduate research papers were produced but are erroneous in terms of the grammar, faulty formatting, and distrustful citations. This seemingly reflects the undergraduate students' lack of mastery of the basic knowledge and skills needed to actually produced a rigorous and methodologically sound research papers within an academic year. The tradition of requiring an undergraduate thesis as a pre-requisite for graduation instead of developing student's competence in the process of conducting research have contributed in the production of low quality research papers in which results are practically unusable and only serve to decorate the wall of offices and libraries.

The unnecessary burden of producing a quality research paper prior to graduation within an academic year without the mastery of the basic process of research production creates a context ripe for unethical practices, such as plagiarism and manipulation of data,

waiting to happen.

Added to the difficulty of producing a completed research paper is the process by which the undergraduate students present their output. An antiquated process riddled with superfluous pageantry and absurd rituals which only make sense if it was done in the context of a graduate school level. One of such is the final thesis defense where undergraduate researchers are at times grilled for an output that they were not sufficiently trained to produce. The essence of collegiality, humility, and mentorship among students and professors sometimes seem lacking on these occasions. The opportunity to mentor students by emphasizing ways on how their output could be improved is at times shadowed by panel members deliberately highlighting the papers shortcomings. The imbalance of power between panel members and students is apparent especially when the suggestion by the panel members are often times viewed as absolute recommendations rather than implied suggestions. Critical thinking, within these situations, are not developed but rather averted. This toxic ambiance of some final thesis defense is one of the reasons why undergraduate students, instead of cultivating love and fondness for research develops an aversion to it.

For the culture of research within a HEI to flourish, these customs surrounding the undergraduate thesis need to change. The need to require an undergraduate research thesis prior to graduation is based on an outmoded tradition and neither is it based on competencies nor outcomes. At the end of the day, the main objective of any undergraduate course is to produce entry level professionals knowledgeable in evidence-based practice with the passion of a life-long learner and not the creation of expert researchers or producers of disciplinary knowledge.



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