Evaluating Alumni Satisfaction in the School of ICT

Extended Abstract

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Sue Petratos[1][0000-0002-2934-5198] and Andre P. Calitz[2][0000-0002-2555-9041]

[1] Nelson Mandela University, School of ICT, Port Elizabeth, South Africa
[2] Nelson Mandela University, Department of Computing Sciences, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

{Sue.Petratos[1], Andre.Calitz[2]}@Mandela.ac.za

Abstract. Alumni are important stakeholders in academic institutions and can provide valuable feedback on service offerings. In the academic environment, customer/student satisfaction and perceived value positively influence graduate/Alumni satisfaction. The purpose of this research study was to measure the perception and satisfaction of the Alumni of the School of ICT at the Nelson Mandela University and to identify areas for improvement by performing a systematic analysis of the determinants of satisfaction. Eight key factors affecting Alumni satisfaction with the School of ICT were investigated. The results indicate that the Alumni agreed that the academic staff and administrative staff maintained high academic standards and that possible new courses and modern technologies could be introduced. Closer links between the School of ICT and Alumni must also be established.

Keywords: Alumni Satisfaction, Alumni Perceptions.

1 Introduction

Alumni are seen and regarded as important assets and stakeholders of a university. Once they have left the university, they become representatives of the university and its departments in the real world and industry [1]. Historically, Alumni networks were created from regional groups brought together for fundraising purposes. Over time these networks developed, both in their own importance and for the university community. The Nelson Mandela University Alumni mission states that, amongst other things, it wishes to use the Alumni's expertise to support the university [2]. This paper provides additional supporting evidence regarding Alumni perceptions on the perceived value of a service being offered in Information Technology (IT) education.

2 The Research Problem and Research Methodology

Graduates from HEIs are Alumni of the institutions and are important stakeholders for universities. In this study, the Alumni satisfaction in the School of ICT at the Nelson Mandela University was investigated. The School of ICT qualifications focus on software development, communication networks and support services. Alumni surveys are not conducted on a regular basis by the Information Technology departments in South Africa and therefore they do not fully understand the graduate perceptions of the study offerings at their academic institutions [3].

The problem statement investigated in this study is that the School of ICT at Nelson Mandela University (NMU) has not considered Alumni perceptions of their study experience at the institution. The main research objective of this study is to measure the perception and satisfaction of Alumni of the School of ICT and identify areas for improvement. An Alumni questionnaire was compiled for this study using a similar questionnaire based on a previous study evaluating the Alumni satisfaction for students in the Department of Computing Sciences at NMU [4]. The proposed model evaluated by Glaum [4] and the factors that influence Alumni perception included Customer Perception, Course Contents, Modern Technologies, Academic Staff, Administrative and Technical Staff, University Atmosphere and Perceived Value.

3 Literature Review

Alumni are recognised as one of the most important assets of a tertiary institution. They are an important asset as the university is represented in the work place by the Alumni of an institution [1]. The achievements of Alumni directly reflect on the institution and any improvements to the quality of the education at the university automatically improve the perceived value of the graduates' qualification. Alumni are a university's best ambassadors and should be kept informed and involved in the vision and priorities of the university and departments. Understanding the Alumni's' satisfaction is important to universities as it plays a role in improving the institution's reputation, as well as the educational program [5].

Glaum's study [4] indicated that there is a relationship between the Alumni perception and quality of academic Staff. The study identified the following factors: The quality of academic staff; The quality of administrative and technical staff; The quality of technology used; The course content; The quality of service provided; The academic institution's culture and structure; The perceived value of service delivered; and The Alumni network.

4 Alumni Survey Results

The Alumni survey was completed by *only* 34 School of ICT Alumni and the majority were from South Africa (90%). The gender of the group included 24 (71%) males and 10 (29%) females. Age of the respondents was 20-24 years (n=1), 25-34 years (n=24) and 35-44 years (n=9). Twenty one (62%) of the respondents have worked less than 5 years in the IT industry, five (15%) 5 to 9 years and eight (24%) 10-19 years. The response to the question: How quickly after completing your studies did you find a job

in the ICT industry? The respondents indicated that 14 (41%) immediately and 10 (29%) within a year. Seven of the 8 factors (Fig. 1) received *Good/Excellent* evaluations ($\mu > 4.0$), however the factor Alumni Network ($\mu=3.25$) received a *Neutral* rating, indicating that this factor requires attention by the School of ICT.
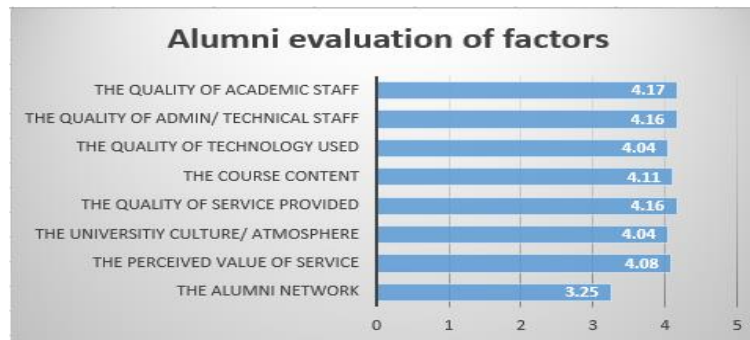

Fig. 1. Alumni evaluation of eight factors.

5   Conclusions

The main research objective of this study was to measure the perception and satisfaction of Alumni of the School of ICT and identify areas for improvement. The Perceived Value on offer at the School of ICT had a positive score ($\mu= 4.1$) indicating *Good/Excellent* Alumni satisfaction. It is important to have satisfied Alumni who can increase under-graduate numbers by recommending the institution to their colleagues, friends and family. The limitations of this research study include the limited number of respondents. The School of ICT should also investigate ways of growing ties with its Alumni.

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