

Factors Influencing Career Pathway of Graduate Students



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ABSTRACT: Education is the backbone of every economy because it is important to build the skills and productivity of an individual. The study aims to identify factors that influence the career pathway of the 223 teachers from the different divisions of region 10, who are taking graduate studies, while considering the factors influencing, such as administration, faculty, support staff, facilities, tuition, and other fees, and peers. This study employed a descriptive correlational and causal research design using a researcher-made questionnaire which was validated and reliability tested. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to determine the study's parameters. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression were used to identify the factors influencing the career pathways of the respondents. Results revealed that graduate students are highly influenced by the administration, faculty, support staff, facilities, tuition & other fees, and peers. Their career pathway is high. There is a strong positive correlation of all the variables except facilities showing a moderate positive correlation. The best predictor of career pathway among graduate students is peer, followed by tuition & other fees and administration. It can be concluded that the respondents continue their graduate studies as agreed by peers and choose a graduate school based on low tuition and other fees and administration. Thus, it is recommended to continue in pursuing graduate studies not only because of peers' invitation but as part of one's career pathway.

KEYWORDS: career pathway, graduate studies, peer influence

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the backbone of every economy because it is important to build the skills and productivity of an individual. Now students evaluate educational institutions based on the alignment of their career aspirations, academic pursuits, and future goals with the educational institution. One of the key factors that affect their decision is whether a particular institution offers good academic programs in the subjects they want to study. Dynamic career services opportunities in school, including, but not limited to career-seeking internships, the associating guidance, and job placement have proven to attract students straying in decide to minimize their successful, lucrative, career path. Cost factors like tuition and available scholarships further complicate things, as students try to balance affordable education with access to essential career support services. Favor is given to institutions that successfully assist students in achieving their career goals while providing the appropriate level of academic rigor, resources, and opportunities.

In addition to these factors from the immediate context of the institution, the broader environment (demographics as well as employment trends) feeding into faculty discussions and student evaluations around the decision around course offerings, grading standards, faculty reputation, comparisons to business functions and insights from peer institutions. Factors like societal expectations or personal ambitions and preferences towards courses that foster both career development and intellectual growth will also be taken into account (Lee, 2021).

Influential elements within the school, including curriculum quality, available facilities, and the overall environment, will guide students in their decision-making process. Additionally, personal and social support networks, which include family influences and peer connections, greatly affect students' choices, underscoring the significance of community in educational decisions. In this context, factors such as parental guidance, the quality of graduate programs, and the standing of the university influence students' selections of institutions (Duong et al., 2023).

In studies involving career pathway of post graduate students in determining which school to enroll, the service quality in higher education directly influences students' choices. A school where it emphasizes the importance of consistently delivering

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the best services that align with students' needs. Moreover, it also emphasized that positive experience of students contributes to a favorable view of the institution. A school that fosters students' engagement and enhances academic performance. Student satisfaction, directly linked to service quality, involves timely responses, helpful staff, and a diverse range of services (Cahyono et al., 2020).

However, there are limited studies concerning the career pathways of post graduate students in terms of choice of school attended. Adefulu (2020) stated that there should be more focused on the post graduate students since most of the studies were only related to the undergraduate students and there is a limited exploration of other influencing factors beyond stakeholders.

Given the preceding, this study aimed to identify which factors influencing such as administration, faculty, support staff, facilities, tuition, fees, and peers predict career pathway among graduate students of Southern Philippines de Oro College. This study is essential because it can help the institution to better understand the needs of their students and improve their services and resources to increase enrollment rates. By understanding the influence between these variables, colleges or institutions can better understand what services they need to provide for the retention and satisfaction of its enrollees. This information can then be used to improve students' perception and ensure that students are receiving the best possible education.

This study was anchored on SERVQUAL Theory by Parasuraman et al. (1985) as cited by Tegowati et al., (2020). SERVQUAL is short for Service Quality. It is a measure of service quality that is based on five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. The theory propounds that service quality is determined by the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of service quality. This study examined the relationship between Factors influencing as SERVQUAL and career pathway of the graduate students as customers. The factors influencing such as administration, faculty, support staff, facilities, tuition, fees, and peers as quality services that graduate students considered in fulfillment of their career pathway. Additionally, such factors influencing may increase their retention and satisfaction or otherwise. It was hypothesized in this study that higher quality service which were the factors influencing would lead to higher students' retention and satisfaction which was referred in this study as the career pathway. By evaluating the gap between students' perceptions and expectations within academic environments, SERVQUAL has previously been identified as having the ability to quantify service quality in an institution.

Additionally, SERVQUAL model is widely used to assess service quality in educational institutions. Studies have applied this model to evaluate academic services in private schools' infrastructure and administrative services in education offices. The model helps identify gaps between expected and perceived service quality, which could allow institutions to prioritize improvements. In higher education, the marketization of education has led to viewing students as customers, emphasizing the need for quality service delivery. Administrative staff play a crucial role in facilitating services and minimizing gaps between expectations and actual service delivered. Understanding different perspectives of service providers and recipients is essential for maximizing students' retention and satisfaction (Malca, 2020).

Overall, the expectations of students as the customers are the standards by which the quality of service provided in school is measured. They are the criteria that must be met for the service to be deemed satisfactory. These expectations can be based on past experiences, industry norms, or even personal preferences. Service providers need to understand and meet these expectations to ensure customers' satisfaction and high retention rates.

II. METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized a descriptive correlational and causal research approach. As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2020), a descriptive correlational design is intended to identify the degree of the relationship between variables, while a causal design aims to ascertain whether and to what extent alterations in one variable affect changes in another. Although data from such studies can be gathered qualitatively, they are frequently analyzed statistically, employing measures such as frequencies, percentages, and means to discover relationships.

The descriptive correlational component of the research intends to investigate the associations between the independent variables and the dependent variable. This study section aims to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between these variables without implying causation. The correlational design is valuable for understanding how factors influencing is linked to career advancement (Jackson, 2021). Since this study embraces the methodologies of the correlational design, quantitative data will first be obtained from the respondents through survey questionnaires.

A causal research design was used to investigate the impact of factors influencing on graduate students' career paths. This entailed pinpointing the factors that directly influence graduate students' decisions regarding career advancement. A causal research design enabled the examination of cause-and-effect relationships, which aided in establishing whether heightened factors influencing results in specific alterations in graduate students' career trajectories (Maxwell & Smith, 2022).

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III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem 1. What is the extent of the factors in school that influence the career pathway of graduate students in terms of:

- 1.1 administration;
- 1.2 faculty;
- 1.3 support staff;
- 1.4 facilities;
- 1.5 tuition and other fees; and
- 1.6 peer?

Table 1: Overall Factors in School that Influence the Career Pathway of the Graduate Students

Variables	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
Administration	4.02	0.81	Agree	Highly Influenced
Faculty	4.29	0.85	Agree	Highly Influenced
Support Staff	3.87	0.86	Agree	Highly Influenced
Facilities	3.64	0.89	Agree	Highly Influenced
Tuition and other fees	3.88	0.81	Agree	Highly Influenced
Peers	4.12	0.81	Agree	Highly Influenced
Overall Mean	3.97	0.84	Agree	Highly Influenced

Note: 4.51-5.00 Very Highly Influenced; 3.51-4.50 Highly Influenced; 2.51-3.50 Moderately Influenced; 1.51-2.50 Less Influenced; 1.00-1.50 Least Influenced

Additionally, the reputation of the school and the quality of its instructors affect students' choices regarding campus selection. This suggests that in the future, leaders in higher education should focus more on enhancing the university's image and the quality of teaching staff, which can foster public confidence and influence prospective students in their decision of where to pursue their education (Harahap et al., 2023).

As shown in the data, *Faculty* has the highest Mean of 4.29 with SD = 0.85, described as Agree and interpreted as Highly Influenced. This indicates that faculty is the first factor considered by students in their studies. The first choice of the respondents in the school setting. The influence of faculty may stem from their ability to teach effectively, provide mentorship, and interact with students, all of which can enhance students' academic motivation, satisfaction, and overall performance which could lead to a career pathway.

According to the study of Raposa et al. (2020), positive relationships with faculty considerably improve students' views on mentorship and their academic achievements, especially through participation in initiatives such as research and projects, underscoring the importance of faculty impact on student growth and contentment.

On the other hand, *Facilities* has the lowest Mean of 3.64 with SD= 0.89, described as Agree and interpreted as Highly Influenced. This suggests that although the school facilities are viewed as important, they might not wield the same degree of influence as aspects like faculty or administration. This implies potential areas for enhancement regarding the quality, accessibility, or upkeep of facilities to address the needs of students more effectively.

In educational institutions, the presence of adequate facilities and infrastructure is fundamental for effective public services and the overall learning experience. These facilities include classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and recreational spaces. This study also revealed that while most services met students' expectations, improvements are needed in areas such as canteen services and comfort rooms (Torres & Manuzon, 2020).

Problem 2. What is the extent of career pathway of the graduate students?

Table 2 shows the extent of the career pathway of graduate students. It has an overall Mean of 4.25 with SD=0.72, described as Agree and interpreted as High. This suggests that graduate students believe their career trajectories are greatly shaped by numerous elements in their academic and professional settings. Career pathways serve as a guide for educational institutions to cultivate employable skills, assist organizations in nurturing talent, and improve engagement and retention (Parfitt, 2020). This indicates that students acknowledge the significance of the support and resources offered by the institution, faculty, peers, and other influential elements in influencing their career objectives and choices. These elements might encompass mentorship, opportunities for skill enhancement, career counseling, and educational experiences that equip them for their professional ambitions.

The indicator 2, *My graduate program has provided the skills and knowledge necessary for my desired career*, holds the

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highest Mean of 4.350 with SD = 0.705, described as Agree and interpreted as High. The data suggest that graduate students have a strong belief in the effectiveness of their programs in preparing them for their career aspirations. This is reflected in a high score, as graduate education provides students with vital skills, knowledge, and practical experience needed for success in their chosen fields. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Cameron et al. (2020), which highlights the importance of direct career preparation through both academic coursework and hands-on learning experiences such as internships, research initiatives, and partnerships with industries. Ultimately, this results in graduates who are ready for employment, as noted by Hernandez and Ng in 2021, emphasizing the critical need for targeted career preparation to enhance employability and career readiness. Furthermore, these programs offer opportunities for specialized skill development and help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge learned in academia and the practical demands of the job market.

Table 2: Career Pathway

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
1	I have a clear understanding of the career opportunities available in my field after graduation.	4.33	0.71	Agree	High
2	My graduate program has provided the skills and knowledge necessary for my desired career.	4.35	0.70	Agree	High
3	The courses and workshops offered in my program are relevant to my career interests.	4.35	0.69	Agree	High
4	Faculty members in my program provide valuable mentorship and career guidance.	4.32	0.70	Agree	High
5	I have access to career fairs and networking events that support my career development.	4.13	0.77	Agree	High
6	My institution provides resources that help students transition into their careers after graduation.	4.28	0.73	Agree	High
7	I am confident that my graduate program will help me secure a job in my field.	4.08	0.78	Agree	High
8	The alumni network at my institution has been a useful resource for career-related advice and opportunities.	4.16	0.69	Agree	High
9	I feel that my graduate program has prepared me to face the challenges in my chosen career.	4.27	0.70	Agree	High
10	I have developed a strong professional network during my graduate studies that will aid my career progression.	4.27	0.68	Agree	High
11	I feel supported by my institution in pursuing job opportunities that align with my academic background.	4.23	0.70	Agree	High
12	My graduate program has exposed me to a wide range of career paths in my field.	4.22	0.72	Agree	High
Overall Mean		4.25	0.71	Agree	High

Note: 4.51-5.00 Very High; 3.51-4.50 High; 2.51-3.50 Moderately High; 1.51-2.50 Low; 1.00-1.50 Very Low

Additionally, indicator 7, *I am confident that my graduate program will help me secure a job in my field*, has the lowest Mean of 4.078 with SD = 0.777, described as Agree and interpreted as High. This suggests that, overall, graduate students felt their programs adequately prepare them for job opportunities. Students may value the skills and expertise they've acquired from their programs, yet they might perceive factors like the job market or competition within their fields as obstacles in obtaining employment. In the study of Hernandez & Park (2023), it stated that Graduate programs that integrate career services, networking opportunities, and industry partnerships can help improve students' confidence in their post-graduation job prospects, further bridging the gap between education and employment outcomes.

Problem 3. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of the factors in school that influence the career pathway and the career pathway of the graduate students?

Table 3 shows the correlation test between the factors in school that influence the career pathway and the career pathway of the graduate students. The test reveals a strong positive correlation and a moderate positive correlation. The administration, faculty, support staff, tuition and fees, as well as peers, exhibit a strong positive correlation. while facilities show

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a moderate positive correlation towards career pathway of the graduate students with r-values of 0.667, 0.611, 0.641, 0.683, 0.707 and 0.561. These suggest that as factors in school influence the career pathways of the graduate students in terms of administration, faculty, support staff, facilities, tuition and other fees and peers increases the career pathway of graduate students also increases. According to Anderson and Peterson (2023), school leaders who create structured mentorship programs and provide regular career counseling opportunities are more likely to guide students toward viable career paths and enhance their employability after graduation.

The p-value for all variables is less than 0.001, which indicates that these correlations are statistically significant, meaning they are unlikely to have occurred by chance. The results of Pearson r correlation classify the strength of these relationships as either Strong Positive Correlation (SPC) or Moderate Positive Correlation (MPC) with the majority falling into the SPC category. Finally, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected for all variables, confirming that each variable has a statistically significant positive correlation with the outcome. The overall interpretation is that all these factors are significantly associated with the outcome, with varying strengths of relationship.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Test Between Factors in School that Influence Career Pathway of the Graduate Students

Variables	r-value	p-value	Level of Correlation	Decision	Interpretation
Administration	0.667	<.001	SPC	Reject H_0	Significant
Faculty	0.611	<.001	SPC	Reject H_0	Significant
Support Staff	0.641	<.001	SPC	Reject H_0	Significant
Facilities	0.561	<.001	MPC	Reject H_0	Significant
Tuition and Other Fees	0.683	<.001	SPC	Reject H_0	Significant
Peer	0.707	<.001	SPC	Reject H_0	Significant

Note: 0.00-0.19 = Very Low Positive Correlation 0.20-0.30 = Low Positive Correlation 0.40-0.59 = Moderate Positive Correlation
0.60-0.79 = Strong Positive Correlation 0.80-1.00 = Very Strong Positive Correlation
Correlation is Significant at the 0.05 Level (2 tails)

In this study, the Administration found a strongly positive correlation ($r = 0.667$, $p < .001$) since they provide the resources, guidance, and opportunities that directly impact students' professional development, The administration's ability to implement supportive academic environment, could create programs tailored to advocate for students can significantly influence their career outcomes. According to Chaudhary (2023), effective communication between students and administration is essential for addressing student needs and ensuring equitable resource distribution and also Administrators' commitment to fostering open communication can enhance students' satisfaction and career readiness.

Faculties have been found to have a statistically significant influence on students' career pathway (Nderitu et al., 2024). In this study, the result found a strongly positive correlation ($r = 0.611$, $p < .001$) between faculty and career pathway of graduate students. The result is in line with the study of Trolan (2021) where their study showed that the faculty interactions significantly influence students' career attitudes. While frequent interactions positively correlate with professional success attitudes, personal discussions and research involvement may negatively impact students' desires for financial success, highlighting the complex role of faculty in shaping career pathways. And, by Brosnan (2020) faculty influence student career pathways through high-impact practices, advising, and mentoring. They recognize the need for support in career direction and acknowledge barriers such as lack of career knowledge and time, which can impede effective student-faculty relationships.

Support staff play a crucial role in creating career development initiatives for students and early-career academics, these initiatives include curriculum-based and extracurricular pathways, as well as collaborative efforts between staff and students (Serbic, 2024). In this study, the support staff showed a strongly positive correlation ($r = 0.641$, $p < .001$) towards career pathway of graduate students. These findings suggest that the role of support staff is crucial in shaping the professional future of graduate students. Their guidance, mentorship, and resources help students make informed career decisions, develop essential skills, and transition smoothly into the workforce. Given the strong and significant correlation, institutions should continue to enhance student support services to improve career outcomes.

The result is in consonance with Lewing (2019) where the result indicates that perceptions of organizational support for community engagement significantly influence employment decisions of faculty and staff, suggesting that support staff's involvement and experiences can shape students' career pathways, particularly through community engagement activities during their education.

Facilities and infrastructure in higher education institutions have a profound impact on student outcomes and career pathways (Juneja, 2019). In this study, the facilities of the graduate school had a strongly positive correlation ($r = 0.561$, $p < .001$)

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towards career pathways among graduate students. This implies that that well-maintained and accessible facilities, such as libraries, classrooms, and technology centers, play a significant role in shaping students' professional development. The result is identical to the study of Nikita et al. (2023) where facilities and infrastructure are crucial for enhancing student learning motivation and productivity, which can indirectly influence students' career pathways by providing a conducive environment for skill development and academic achievement essential for future opportunities.

Tuition and Other Fees directly influence students' decisions to choose universities, highlighting the importance of affordability in shaping career pathways (Harahap et al., 2021). In this study, the tuition and other fees of graduate school showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.683$, $p < .001$) towards the career pathway of graduate students. This suggests that students are drawn to the institution largely because of its affordable cost. This significant relationship indicates that, as the tuition and fees remain relatively low, more students are likely to pursue graduate school as a cost-effective alternative. The findings support the conclusions of Muller-Parker et al. (2020), which indicated that graduates from programs with more affordable tuition are more likely to have diverse career paths, as they carry less debt—a factor that allows them to explore any career choices, where financial considerations can significantly influence their future careers.

In the study of Rubineau et al., (2023), the peers with whom students associate have a considerable impact, potentially even more than close friends or study companions. The study shows a strong positive correlation ($r=0.707$, $p<0.001$) between peers and the career choices of graduate students, indicating that students are greatly influenced by their social surroundings, particularly through peer interactions and relationships. This influence may stem from shared academic experiences or the reciprocal exchange of information regarding career opportunities. When students observe their peers pursuing higher education and excelling academically, they are likely to be more motivated to follow a similar path. These findings support Angwaomadoko's research (2023), which asserts that peers play a crucial role in supporting and influencing the career decision-making of graduate students. Their effect can shape ambitions, provide encouragement, and contribute to the decision-making process in various ways, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of peer influence. According to Rubineau et al. (2023), peers have a substantial effect on the academic choices of graduate students, especially related to selecting a major and maintaining persistence. The study emphasized that even some acquaintances might have a greater influence on students' career paths than others.

Problem 4. Which of the independent variable/s singly or in combination influence the career pathway of the graduate students?

As shown in Table 4, the variables that predict the career pathway of Graduate Students were peer = 0.430, Tuition & Other Fees with beta weight equal to 0.232, administration 0.150, Faculty 0.050, Support Staff 0.022, Facilities 0.021 and respectively, and the corresponding p values of Peer, Tuition & Other Fees, and Administration are less than the significance level of $p < 0.05$. Additionally, the unstandardized coefficient of Peer $X_1 = 0.418$, followed by Tuition & Other Fees $X_2 = 0.232$, Administration $X_3 = 0.178$, Faculty $X_4 = 0.041$, Support Staff $X_5 = 0.019$ and Facilities $X_6 = 0.018$. The results indicate that peer is one of the best predictors of Graduate School Career Pathway. This is followed by Tuition & Other Fees, Administration, Faculty, Support Staff, and Facilities which help one make decisions.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Factors influencing Career Pathway of Graduate Students

Predictor	Estimate	SE	β	t-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Constant	0.694	0.184		3.776	<.001		
Administration	0.178	0.076	0.150	2.347	0.020	Reject Ho	Significant
Faculty	0.041	0.053	0.050	0.774	0.440	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Support Staff	0.019	0.086	0.022	0.220	0.826	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Facilities	0.018	0.067	0.021	0.268	0.789	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Tuition & Other Fees	0.202	0.071	0.232	2.840	0.005	Reject Ho	Significant
Peer	0.418	0.050	0.430	8.355	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	R	R²	F value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation	
Model	0.805	0.647	65.172	<.001	Reject Ho	Significant	

Note: Dependent Variable= Graduate Students' Career Pathway

Significant when computed p-value <0.05

Table 4 also shows the individual standard error of beta coefficient estimates on the independent variables. The R^2

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=0.647 means that the model explains that the linear relationship with peers, tuition & other fees, administration, faculty, support staff, and facilities describes 64.7% of the variation of career pathway. As indicated in the F value of 65.172 with the corresponding probability value of <.001, this means the regression model is significant, independent variables for Peer, Tuition & Other Fees, and Administration that may impact career pathway of graduate students.

Since Peer is the best predictor in this study, graduate students often spend significant time in collaborative environments, such as group projects, study sessions, and academic discussions, where they exchange ideas, challenges, and success stories. This constant interaction allows students to gain insight into different career paths and to receive encouragement or advice from those who are navigating similar academic journeys. In the study of Wu and Yu (2024) they found out that a positive causal relationship between a student's decision to pursue further education and that of their friends, indicating that peers significantly influence career pathways, thereby exacerbating social stratification in educational attainment among graduate students.

Evidently, the regression analysis presented in Table 10 demonstrates that peers have the most significant impact on the career trajectories of graduate students, as evidenced by the highest beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.430$) and a highly significant p-value (<.001). This indicates that interactions with peers are essential in shaping students' career aspirations and choices. Financial elements such as tuition and fees ($\beta = 0.232$, $p = 0.005$) and administration ($\beta = 0.150$, $p = 0.020$) were also identified as meaningful predictors, suggesting that economic factors and institutional assistance play a role in career pathways. In contrast, faculty, support personnel, and facilities were not found to be statistically significant predictors, implying that while these aspects enhance the overall educational experience, they do not exert as strong an influence on career choices as peer interactions. The model's R^2 value of 0.647 indicates that 64.7% of the variation in career paths is explained by the independent variables included, affirming the model's robustness. These findings are consistent with earlier research highlighting the importance of peer influence in career development, where students depend on their social networks for guidance, motivation, and access to career opportunities. This implies that educational institutions should promote strong peer connections and collaborative learning settings to improve career preparedness and decision-making among graduate students.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1) Graduate students choose, enroll or continue to stay in a school that they know to have the factors they consider to be at its best such as the administration, faculty, tuition and other fees and even peers and facilities.
- 2) Teachers know that to have bigger salaries, they need to be promoted, and going to graduate studies is the first step to reach their high goals.
- 3) What Graduate Studies could offer is associated with the graduate students' choice of enrolling in an institution. They consider graduate school as an avenue to increase their career and reach their goals.
- 4) Taking graduate studies is a choice for reasons that they are invited by their friends and because of its low tuition fees. Peer influence, tuition, and administration were key determinants of students' career decisions.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- 1) Although graduate students perceive the availability and cleanliness of basic amenities as moderately influential, while the presence of such facilities is important, the facilities have not consistently met students' expectations. Prioritize the enhancement of campus safety by performing regular assessments, increasing lighting installations, and improving surveillance systems, while also focusing on upgrading vital facilities like restrooms and maintaining readiness for emergencies to ensure students' welfare.
- 2) Develop a comprehensive and intuitive platform or application that allows students to effortlessly find details regarding school policies, accessible resources, and job opportunities, guaranteeing clear and reliable communication from the administration.
- 3) Graduate schools ought to improve their program offerings, offer better career support, provide flexible learning opportunities, establish stronger partnerships with industries, and broaden financial aid options to more effectively draw in and assist students in reaching their professional aspirations.
- 4) Graduate schools will continue the marketing strategies like advertisement and may include discounts to those who can bring in another enrollee to support graduate students who wish to trod their career path and reach their goals.

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