University, Enrollment and Graduates Trends: Basis for Long-Term Development Plan

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ABSTRACT

Data on university enrollment and graduates helps determine the demand and effectiveness of programs offered. It will serve as a basis for planning, resource allocation, and strategic development. The study examined the enrollment and graduation trends at Cotabato State University. In particular, the enrollment and graduation trends of Cotabato State University for Academic Years 2018-2019 to 2024–2025, according to levels. The study employed a descriptive research method and documentary analysis. The study reveals that the total enrollment decreased from AY 2018-2019 to AY 2019-2020, following the same pattern as undergraduate enrollment. From 15,085 students in AY 2022-2023 to 21,224 students in AY 2023-2024, enrollment increased significantly. As of AY 2024-2025, the number of students enrolled is the highest, at 24,835. The enrollment trend initially declined, particularly in AY 2019-2020, with a significant 17.8% decrease compared to AY 2018-2019. In the following years, however, there were fluctuations, with AY 2020-2021 reporting an increase of 15.0%, AY 2022-2023 reporting an increase of 9.1%, and AY 2021-2022 reporting a decrease of 11.2%. In addition, during AY 2023-2024, there was a substantial increase of 40.7%. Furthermore, in AY 2024-2025, there was also a 17.0% increase compared to AY 2023-2024. The number of undergraduate graduates shows more fluctuations, with a significant decrease between AY 2018-2019 and AY 2019-2020 from 1,862 to 1,097. Between AY 2019-2020 and AY 2022-2023, the numbers remain relatively stable, with significant increases in AY 2023-2024 and AY 2024-2025. Overall, the number of graduates increased from 2,034 in AY 2018-2019 to 2,634 in AY 2024-2025. As the years progressed, there was a gradual increase in AY 2019-2020, followed by a significant decrease in AY 2019-2020. According to these data, the graduate program appears to be growing, especially in AY 2023-2024. The undergraduate program has fluctuated but shown an increase in AY 2024-2025 compared to AY 2018-2019. AY 2019-2020 saw a significant decrease of 31.12%. There are also decreases in the following two years (AY 2020-2021 and AY 2021-2022), although at a slower pace. There was a slight increase in AY 2022-2023, followed by significant increases in AY 2023-2024 (36.62%) and AY 2024-2025 (43.23%). As a result of these data, it can be said that graduation rates dropped significantly at first, but then showed a strong rebound in the later years. It indicates a potential shift in trends or successful initiatives in AY 2023-2024 and AY 2024-2025.

Keywords: Enrollment, Graduates, Trend, Graduate, Undergraduate, University

INTRODUCTION

The development of a nation's economy and society depends on quality education. Mendoza (1994) emphasizes the importance of education in a country's development. In his view, progress will ensue once human resources are educated to activate the development syndrome. In developing countries and even in developed ones, efforts, time, and fiscal resources must be invested to develop the potential of citizens.

Education plays an essential role in providing the human capital required for sustainable development (Mateja & Palvin, 2012). Knowledge has become a critical competitive advantage in a global economy, where higher education has become essential. Therefore, higher education is crucial to enhancing employability skills (Yimer et al. al. 2024). According to Hermannsson et al., (2017), the higher education systems have grown in recent years with an increase in students and graduates. Increasing higher education enrollment, graduation rates, and students profile is fundamental to this goal.

Whenever the school year starts in public schools across the country, the Department of Education (DepEd) faces perennial challenges that prevent it from providing quality education, as it is the department's ultimate goal. Some perennial problems are a lack of classrooms, reading materials, learning guides, or textbooks. In addition, incompetent teachers, insufficient teaching applies to State Universities and Colleges when the government reduces their budget allocations (Durban and Catalan, 2012), and Asuncion (2002) found that despite the constitution's requirement that education receive a large share of the national budget, facilities and equipment are still inadequate. The Cabarteja (2002), Asuncion (2002), and Durban and Catalan (2012) reports indicate that plans and resources are not aligned. In the case where planning is only done centrally without involving local levels, or planning is done locally or at the school level. Planning exercises are to be conducted without in-depth data analysis, even if they are, of course, to be conducted. Budgets are usually submitted by the end of the year so that they can be included in national budgets.

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) envisions itself as promoter of equitable access and ensures the quality and relevancy of the higher education institutions and their programs. A vital role in achieving this vision is played by CHED Regional Offices and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in their areas.The higher education industry has evolved into a competitive industry in the 21st century. Sanyal, et al. (1981) identify elements that affects the development

of the whole educational system, this includes enrolment trends, and the effects of this expansion on the labor market's absorption capacity.

As a whole, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and Region XII have a diverse and pluralistic higher education system, with both public and private institutions coexisting. There is a dynamic and changing enrolment in most Higher Education Institutions, which changes the yearly number of graduates. In educational institutions, enrollment constitutes the creation of a record that contains a person's data and a requirement for admission. In order to organize itself in the process of enrolling new students and retaining old ones, it is imperative to understand that enrollment is confirmed by procedures, policies, and activities (Chamilco et al., 2023). As a result of achieving university status, the institution's enrollment has increased significantly. Cotabato State University is popular among college students since it offers free tuition and high-quality education. It is crucial to increase university enrollment to unlock opportunities for individuals and advance society.

In addition to empowering individuals to achieve their goals, extending access to higher education contributes to the growth of the economy, fosters innovation, and promotes social mobility. All levels of government, educational institutions, and communities should take steps to address these challenges and enhance accessibility, affordability, and inclusion of education (Brad, 2021). Besides assisting this university with enrollment, this research will also help the university achieve its mission and vision. Furthermore, this will provide the university with an understanding of why incoming undergraduates, and graduate school students choose Cotabato State University over other universities in the Bangamoro region.

RELATED LITERATURE

Students' enrollment patterns in tertiary education in Nepal were examined by Trital et al (2024). Additionally, this paper compares the production of both technical and non-technical graduates of the Tribhuvan University (TU) with other Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs). The descriptive and analytical research design was used to examine the secondary data collected over a decade. Data was thoroughly analyzed and expertly presented in a variety of graphs. Study results indicate that the number of students pursuing higher education has been steadily increasing every year, with female students showing a remarkable increase. There was a significant increase of the number of students obtaining No Objection Certificates (NOCs) over the past decade. It is estimated that over 76% of Nepal's tertiary education is provided by

Tribhuvan University (TU), one of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the country. In terms of pursuing higher education abroad, according to enrollment patterns in tertiary education, there was a significant increase of the number of students who obtained NOCs from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST). In addition to extensive research, socioeconomic, demographic, and institutional factors play a role in determining enrollment in higher education.

In a concurrent parallel study conducted by Aparacio, et al (2023), the authors investigated the last six (6) years enrolment trends of Davao Central College located in Toril, Davao City, Philippines. This study used the triangulation method. Using internal stakeholders (students and employees) as sources of information on enrollment trends, this study aims to analyze their perceptions of enrollment trends. Additionally, the study aims to find out the retention rate for each curricular program offerings. Furthermore, the study also intends to identify the reasons why students enroll in a school and drop out. In addition, this study aims to generate innovative ideas and knowledge to increase and sustain enrollment. This study will have benefits both in the school and industry. The business industry may benefit from providing competent graduates. The results, of the quantitative and qualitative data, shows that a number of aspects contributed to students' enrolment and dropout rates. The quantitative findings of the study was supported by the developed qualitative themes to pave the way for a successful concurrent parallel study method.

A study by Patulin (2023) examined admissions, enrollment, and completion of graduate programs at Surigao del Norte State University between SY 2010-2011 and SY 2021-2022. The needed data were taken from the Registrar's Office. In addition, sixty (60) respondents were purposely asked about the factors contributing to the lateness and low completion rate of the programs; most of them were graduate students who stopped school in the semester where they were writing their thesis and dissertation due to a lack of funds to spend during the research writing period. According to the study, admission, enrollment, and completion rates have grown from SY 2010-2011 to SY 2021-2022. Graduate programs provide adequate knowledge and skills. The skills could be enhanced to maximize teaching-learning processes in the classroom by involving students as learners. There is, however, a low completion rate. This prompted the author to recommend to management that it review existing research policies and improve its educational environment.

In Ramos's study (2023), a machine learning-based enrollment prediction model is developed and assessed for the BS in Information Technology program at the Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas. Initially, the study analyzes the demographics of the enrolled students, revealing that there is a notable gender imbalance among them. Despite high enrollment rates, the gender gap necessitates a deeper investigation into targeted recruitment strategies, promoting inclusivity within the BSIT community. A student's decision to enroll is heavily influenced by the program offerings, the availability of financial aid, and his or her personal recommendation. This report recommends prioritizing authentic word-of-mouth promotion, optimizing online visibility, and leveraging social media to effectively recruit in a competitive market. This study examines enrollment, goals, and satisfaction data for students. The report suggests improvements in addressing neutral responses, incorporating diverse sources of information, and addressing post-enrollment goals. To enhance the overall educational experience, the study recommends multifaceted communication, tailored support, and flexible pathways. In this study, machine learning was employed to predict enrollment trends for the 2028-2029 school year using Google CoLab. To reverse second-year enrollment dip, the study proposes strategic recruitment, adaptation to student demands, targeted marketing, and financial aid. The increase in growth in subsequent years indicates successful student participation and program offerings, highlighting the need for continuous adaptation to facilitate student success. These recommendations, drawn from the study, advocate the use of machine learning for forecasting trends, monitoring the effectiveness of monitoring strategies, strategic marketing, creating a supportive learning environment, and updating recruitment strategies to respond to demographic shifts. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the importance of creating a conducive academic community and implementing innovative measures to support students' success.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study examined the enrollment and graduation trends at Cotabato State University. In particular, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the enrolment trends of Cotabato State University for Academic Years 2018 - 2019 to 2024 – 2025 according to levels?

2. What are the Graduate trends of Cotabato State University for Academic Years 2018 - 2019 to 2024 – 2025 according to level?

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research method was utilized in this study. This research design focuses on describing and summarizing the university's enrollment and graduates. According to Sirisilla (2023), descriptive research gives an overall view of a population's characteristics and behaviors. In this way, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the topic. In this study, descriptive research was used to gather information that can be used by the university to improve student services and formulate policies relevant to students' welfare, as well as to inform future research.

Data collection processes

In this study, document analysis was used. Document analysis defined by Bowen (2009) as a systematic review or evaluation of electronic documents or printed. As compared to other research methods, document analysis is more time- and cost-effective, offers free access to documents online, and lacks obtrusiveness and reactivity (Bowen, 2009).

The enrollment and graduation data were obtained from SIMONE, the university's web-based enrollment management system. Undergraduate and graduate enrollments were consolidated by academic year and level. Data on enrollment and graduates were collected for the academic years 2018-2019 and 2024-2025.

Data Analysis Technique

A simple formula was used to calculate the percentage increase or decrease in enrollment and graduation between two years. For the difference in enrollment and graduates between the two years, subtract the earliest year's enrollment or graduate number from the later year's enrollment or graduate number. Once the difference is calculated, divide it by the enrollment or graduate number of the earlier year to get the proportion of change. Finally, multiply the proportion by 100 to convert it to a percentage. By using this formula, the growth or decline in enrollment can be easily compared over time, so that informed decisions can be made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students Enrollment Status per Level

Table 1 shows the number of students enrolled from the academic year 2018-2019 to 2024-2025. Breaking it out by level, overall, there was an increase in graduate school enrollment from 2,368 in AY 2018-2019 to 2,934 in AY 2024-2025. Notably, enrollment increased from

AY 2018-2019 to AY 2020-2021, with enrollment growing from 2,368 to 3,017, and enrollment remaining stable at 2,544 from AY 2021-2022 to AY 2023-2024. Further, the highest enrollment was during AY 2024-2025, with 2,934 students.

The undergraduate enrollment fluctuated from 14,097 in AY 2018-2019 to 10,994 in AY 2019-2020. Following this, during AY 2022-2023 to AY 2023-2024, the number jumped from 12,541 to 18,680. The highest enrollment, with 21,901 students, was recorded in AY 2024-2025.

Overall, total enrollment decreased from AY 2018-2019 to AY 2019-2020, following the same pattern as undergraduate enrollment. From 15,085 students in AY 2022-2023 to 21,224 students in AY 2023-2024, enrollment increased significantly. As of AY 2024-2025, the most students are enrolled, with 24,835. The findings suggest that over the years, graduate enrollment has been relatively stable, with some growth. The undergraduate enrollment has fluctuated more in recent years, but has recently increased significantly. Total enrollment has increased overall, driven largely by undergraduate enrollment growth. The findings are supported by a study conducted by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2023). In the study, the Free Tuition Law increases the college enrollment rates, particularly among low-income students. However, student retention rates remain high, with four (4) out of ten (10) students dropping out before finishing their education. Also reported in Panorama Education (2024), student enrollment surged 11% during the school year 2023-2024, reaching 163,000 students.

Moreover, during the launch of a research initiative of the Commission on Higher Education (CHEd) last February 12, 2024, assessing the admission system and retention of students in select state universities and colleges, it was cited that there was a high attrition rate of at least four out of ten students in higher education. Also, the commission linked the increasing attrition to financial difficulties, family problems, relocation, medical or mental health concerns, and academic struggles. According to an Instructure study conducted in 2023, 77% of Filipino students pursue skills-based learning to acquire new skills, while 68% view it as a means of advancing their careers. The number of students considering certificate programs and apprenticeships is growing, with 43% in the certificate program and 39% in the apprenticeship program, respectively.

According to research conducted by the University of the Philippines (2024), the grades earned during high school are a better predictor of academic performance, whereas the scores achieved

during entrance exams reflect the background characteristics of a student. Adding less weight to standardized tests may improve college admissions equity.

Table 1: *Number of Students Enrollment by Level for Academic Year 2018-2019 to 2024-2025*

Level	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Graduate	2,368	2,544	3,017	2,544	2,544	2,544	2,934.00
Undergraduate	14,097	10,994	12,554	11,279	12,541	18,680	21,901.00
Total	**16,465**	**13,538**	**15,571**	**13,823**	**15,085**	**21,224**	**24,835.00**

The percentage increase/decrease in Enrollment

Based on the number of new students enrolled between one academic year and the next, Table 2 shows the percentage increase or decrease in enrollment. The trend declined initially, particularly in AY 2019-2020, with a significant decrease of 17.8% compared to AY 2018-2019. In the following years, however, there were fluctuations, with AY 2020-2021 reporting an increase of 15.0%, AY 2022-2023 reporting an increase of 9.1%, and AY 2021-2022 reporting a decrease of 11.2%. In addition, during AY 2023-2024, there was a substantial increase of 40.7%. Further, in AY 2024-2025, there was also an increase of 17.0% compared to AY 2023-2024. According to the data, enrollment numbers have been unstable, with significant fluctuations over time. Even though enrollment fluctuates, the overall trend indicates growth, especially in later years. The Phinma Education study (2024) confirmed the study's findings, which reported a 163,000 student enrollment surge in the academic year 2023-2024, an increase of 11%. As a result of this growth, net income for the fiscal year 2024-2025 grew 8%, reaching $1.55 billion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a study by Poonyawat Kusonwattana et al. (2022) found that perceptions of behavioral control, subjective norm, and attitude towards use significantly influenced students' intention to enroll in online education. According to Jeremiah Joven Joaquin et al. (2020), the pandemic has had a significant impact on the Philippine higher education sector, highlighting the shift to online learning and its challenges.

Table 2: *Percentage Increase/Decrease in Enrollment for 2018-19-2024-2025 by Level*

	Difference	Percentage	Interpretation

Academic Year			
AY 2019-2020 vs. AY 2018-2019	-2,927	17.8%	Decrease
AY 2020-2021 vs. AY 2019-2020	2,033	15.00%	Increase
AY 2021-2022 vs. AY 2020-2021	-1,748	11.2%	Decrease
AY 2022-2023 vs. AY 2021-2022	1,262	9.1%	Increase
AY 2023-2024 vs. AY 2022-2023	6,139	40.7%	Increase
AY 2024-2025 vs. AY 2023-2024	3,611	17.0%	Increase

Graduates Status per Level

On the other hand, the number of undergraduate graduates shows more fluctuations, with a significant decrease between AY 2018-2019 and AY 2019-2020 from 1,862 to 1,097. Between AY 2019-2020 and AY 2022-2023, the numbers remain relatively stable, with significant increases in AY 2023-2024 and AY 2024-2025. Overall, the number of graduates increased from 2,034 in AY 2018-2019 to 2,634 in AY 2024-2025. As the years progressed, there was a gradual increase in AY 2019-2020, followed by a significant decrease in AY 2019-2020. According to these data, the graduate program appears to be growing, especially in AY 2023-2024. The undergraduate program is fluctuating, but has shown an increase in AY 2024-2025. As a result of growth in both graduate and undergraduate programs, the number of graduates has increased overall.

In a study conducted by Egar and Oliva (2024), students' knowledge of Filipino subjects partly mediates the relationship between learning experiences and communicative skills. Additionally, Bautista and Del Valle (2023) investigated the relationship between communicative competence and oral language usage among Filipino learners. In Tuastomban's (2024) study, teaching strategies were examined in relation to student participation. According to Culla's (2020) study, public policy research in the Philippines faces many challenges and opportunities. In contrast, Nicod-amhand, Nicod-am Camhol's (2025) study examined the multifunctionality of bulul, a mythical god in Philippine culture, and its significance in healing.

In its Philippine Studies journal, Ateneo de Manila University publishes articles that provide insights into the country's history and culture. According to Paredes' (2023) research, banana plantations in the Philippines negatively affect the environment and local communities. Studies have also focused on sustainable development in the Philippines, including the country's efforts to balance economic growth with environmental protection.

Table 3: *Number of Graduates by Level for Academic Year 2018-2019 to 2024-2025*

Level	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Graduate	172	229	205	229	229	405	374
Undergraduate	1,862	1,097	1,062	1,097	1,097	1,434	2,260
Total	**2,034**	**1,326**	**1,267**	**1,326**	**1,326**	**1,839**	**2,634**

The percentage increase/decrease in Graduates

Table 4 shows the percentage change in graduates from one academic year to the next based on the number of graduates. Compared to AY 2018-2019, AY 2019-2020 saw a significant decrease of 31.12%. There are also decreases in the following two years (AY 2020-2021 and AY 2021-2022), although at a slower pace. There was a slight increase in AY 2022-2023, followed by significant increases in AY 2023-2024 (36.62%) and AY 2024-2025 (43.23%). As a result of these data, it can be said that graduation rates dropped significantly in the beginning, but then showed a strong rebound in the later years. It indicates a potential shift in trends or successful initiatives in AY 2023-2024 and AY 2024-2025.

Table 4: *Percentage Increase/Decrease in Graduates for 2018-19-2024-2025 by Level*

Academic Year	Difference	Percentage	Interpretation
AY 2019-2020 vs. AY 2018-2019	-633	31.12%	Decrease
AY 2020-2021 vs. AY 2019-2020	-59	4.21%	Decrease
AY 2021-2022 vs. AY 2020-2021	-16	1.19%	Decrease
AY 2022-2023 vs. AY 2021-2022	75	5.66	Increase
AY 2023-2024 vs. AY 2022-2023	513	36.62	Increase
AY 2024-2025 vs. AY 2023-2024	795	43.23%	Increase

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that enrollment and graduation numbers at the university have fluctuated over time. In the past few years, enrollment and graduation have increased significantly. While

the graduate program has shown steady growth, the undergraduate program has been more volatile. In spite of fluctuations, the overall trend indicates that enrollments and graduations are increasing at the institution. Growth in recent years is a positive sign, and the institution may want to monitor trends and identify factors that contribute to growth or decline to inform strategic decisions. In this way, the institution can capitalize on its strengths and address areas for improvement to sustain its growth.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can help the university build on its strengths, improve in areas that need improvement, and sustain its growth.

1. Keep track of trends and identify factors that influence growth and decline to inform strategic decisions.

2. Develop new graduate programs and enhance existing ones to capitalize on the growing graduate program market.

3. Develop strategies to stabilize and grow undergraduate enrollment and graduation numbers by investigating factors contributing to volatility.

4. Identify the reasons for initial declines in enrollment and graduation numbers to prevent similar trends in the future.

5. Gather and analyze data to inform strategic decisions and tailor initiatives to meet specific challenges and opportunities.

VIII. Acknowledgement

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