

# Thirteen-Year- Guidance Counsellors Licensure Examination (GCLE) Performance of the Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG) Graduates: The Case of a Philippine State Institution

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## Abstract

Licensure exam performance is a key metric for evaluating the quality of academic programs in many higher education institutions. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of these results is a fundamental step in program evaluation. This study analysed the institutional performance of Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG) graduates from a Philippine State University in the Guidance Counsellors Licensure Examination (GCLE). It encompasses profiling institutional outcomes and conducting comparative analyses of graduate performance based on examinee classification, sex, and undergraduate academic background. Using archival data from the Philippine Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), this analysis revealed a high 13-year institutional average passing rate of 71.67%. Notably, this institutional passing rate (IPR) exceeded the national average by 13.06% ( $p = .041$ ). An in-depth examination of performance across the six GCLE content areas indicated that MAG graduates demonstrated the highest proficiency in Area 4: "Organization, administration, and supervision of guidance" (83.33% passing rate, Mean = 78.03). Conversely, their performance was weakest in Area 5: "Group process and program development" (58.33% passing rate, Mean = 72.30). While examinee sex did not emerge as a significant predictor of overall performance, first-time takers and graduates holding undergraduate degrees in psychology exhibited demonstrably higher outcomes. The resulting curriculum and policy implications of these findings are discussed herein.

**Keywords:** Guidance Counsellors' Licensure Examination (GCLE), Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG), Non-Psychology, Psychology, Undergraduate Degree.

## Introduction

Program quality and effectiveness are frequently evaluated through graduates' performance in licensure examinations (1). Licensure performances are critical gatekeepers for entry into regulated professions, ensuring practitioners possess the requisite skills and competencies for the job market (2-4). Consequently, higher education institutions offering programs requiring licensure are ethically and strategically obliged to implement measures that enhance their graduates' success in these examinations (5). The institutional strategies to improve licensure examination outcomes can be broadly categorized into pre-examination preparations and post-examination analyses (6). Pre-examination interventions encompass selective admission criteria, rigorous academic retention policies, systematic faculty monitoring and evaluation, dedicated review sessions, comprehensive program competency appraisals, and formative mock examinations (7).

Conversely, post-examination procedures include conducting exit interviews with licensure examination takers or performing thorough analyses of their licensure examination performance (8, 9). The former strategy is crucial for identifying program strengths and areas requiring improvement (10). In-depth analysis allows for identifying content domains within the examinations and identifying the cohorts exhibiting comparatively lower performance. The insights from such studies can then inform the development and implementation of targeted and appropriate interventions for subsequent groups of examinees. The Professional Regulations Commission (PRC) administers the Guidance Counsellors Licensure Examination (GCLE) in the Philippines. Mandated by the Guidance and Counselling Act of 2004 (Republic Act 9258), this examination is a prerequisite for graduates of master's degree programs in Guidance and

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(Received 12<sup>th</sup> July 2025; Accepted 15<sup>th</sup> October 2025; Published 12<sup>th</sup> January 2026)

Counselling (11). The first GCLE administration occurred in 2008 (12). The present study focuses on a state-run institution in the Cordillera Administrative Region of the Philippines. Its College of Teacher Education has offered the Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG), formerly the Master of Arts in Education Major in Guidance and Counselling (MAED GC), since. This institution's MAG program graduates have participated in the GCLE from 2009 to 2018. Following a two-year hiatus in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, the examination resumed, with the most recent cohort of takers in 2024. The institution has a thirteen-year history of its graduates undertaking the GCLE. This investigation represents the inaugural in-depth analysis of the GCLE performance of graduates from the case institution. While the institution routinely conducts performance analyses for graduates of other licensure-requiring programs, such as the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) and the Librarian's Licensure Examination (LLE), a comparable analysis for the GCLE has not been previously undertaken.

Furthermore, scholarly literature featuring analyses of GCLE performance remains limited. A review of existing publications identified only two studies specifically examining GCLE results. One study compared the performance of graduates from public and private higher education institutions in the GCLE between 2008 and 2013 (12). The second study compared GCLE performance among graduates from autonomous and deregulated Philippine higher education institutions from 2016 to 2019 (11).

A separate phenomenological study explored the teaching competencies and pedagogical strategies that GCLE passers perceived as effective in their preparation as guidance counsellors (13). This qualitative research offered valuable insights into the crucial role of curriculum and instruction in developing competent guidance counsellors.

Addressing the identified knowledge and evidence gaps, this study was conceptualized to investigate the GCLE performance of graduates from the case institution over thirteen years. Specifically, this research described the thirteen-year performance trend of MAG graduates in the Guidance Counsellors Licensure Examination (GCLE); compared the thirteen-year GCLE institutional performance with national-level data; compared the performance of the MAG graduates across the

six content areas of the GCLE; and determined significant differences in the overall and content area performance on the GCLE among MAG graduates when grouped according to examinee classification, sex, and undergraduate academic background.

This study's dependent variables are the MAG graduates' overall and area-specific performance in the GCLE. Performance was operationalized through two key indicators: the passing rate and the mean scores/ratings obtained in the examination. Figure 1 illustrates the six distinct content areas evaluated in the GCLE, along with their respective weights in the overall score.

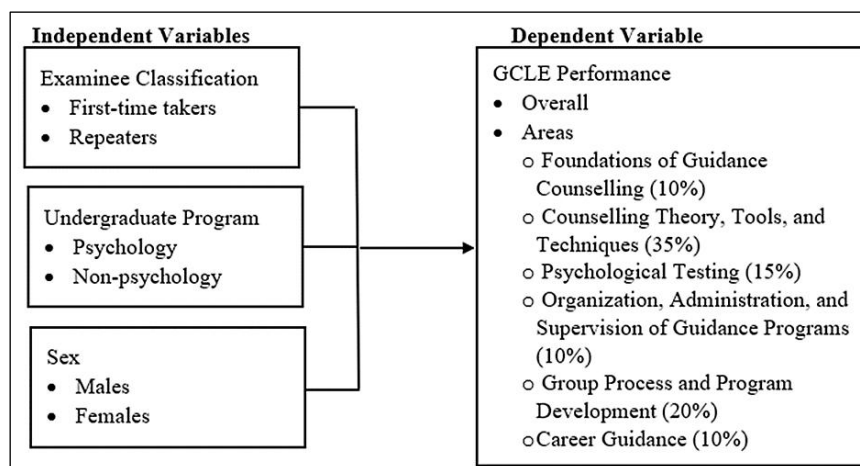
This research posits several independent variables as potential predictors of MAG graduates' GCLE performance. The first among the hypothesized factors is examinee classification, differentiating between first-time takers and repeater examinees. Prior research in other licensure examinations, such as teachers, librarians, criminologists, nurses, and psychometricians, has consistently demonstrated lower performance among repeater examinees (1, 14-19). Based on these established trends, a similar pattern of lower performance is anticipated for repeaters of the GCLE.

The undergraduate degree of the MAG graduates is another hypothesized factor influencing GCLE performance. Given the conceptual and methodological overlap between guidance, counselling, and allied disciplines, it is theorized that graduates with undergraduate degrees in psychology and other behavioural sciences may exhibit superior performance in the GCLE compared to graduates from different academic backgrounds. This assumption stems from the potential for a stronger foundational knowledge base and more aligned skill sets developed in these fields.

Finally, the sex of the MAG graduates is considered a potential determinant of their GCLE performance. The influence of examinee sex on licensure examination outcomes has been shown to vary across different professional domains. For instance, studies have indicated that sex is not a significant predictor in the Criminologist Licensure Examination and the Librarian's Licensure Examination (17, 20). Likewise, sex was not a significant predictor in fisheries, agriculture, education, and accountancy licensure examinations (21). However, the variable has

emerged as a significant factor in the Civil Engineering Licensure Examination and the Licensure Examination for Teachers among BSED Science majors (22, 23). These inconsistencies led the study to explore the potential relationship between the sex of MAG graduates and their performance in the GCLE.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. Three examinee variables, i.e., examinee classification as either first-time takers or repeaters, undergraduate program, and sex, were the hypothesized independent variables. The overall and area-specific GCLE performance was the study's dependent variables.



**Figure 1:** Framework of the Study

## Methodology

This study employed the archival method of quantitative research. The archival method involves using originally generated data for information and research (24). These archival data are often safeguarded (due to legal requirements) but made available for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of and improve programs.

The researchers requested the archival data for this study from the Philippine Professional Regulation Commission (PRC). While licensure examination results are publicly and freely available online, and research is a recognized exception under the Data Privacy Act, the researchers rigorously adhered to the fundamental ethical principles of anonymity and confidentiality. The archival data obtained from the PRC contained ten columns of information for the GCLE. The first column contained the examinees' names, and the last column indicated their classification as either a first-time taker (code 1) or a repeater (code 2). Upon receiving the official results from the PRC, a disinterested office staff member was tasked with removing the first column (containing names) and the last column (containing examinee classification), thus

separating them from the columns containing the scores. Professors from the MAG program were then asked to identify the sex and undergraduate degrees associated with the given names. This information was subsequently matched with the examinee classification. The names were replaced with unique codes generated based on the collected data to ensure anonymity. For instance, the code 1MP-01 denoted a first-time taker male examinee with a psychology degree, while 2FN-02 indicated a repeater female examinee with a non-psychology degree. The final numerals served to reveal the examinees' sequential order. The scores were then re-matched with these anonymized codes, and the original list containing the examinees' names was securely shredded. Finally, the new, anonymized dataset was encoded into a spread sheet to facilitate data analysis. The office staffs were then asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement after the said procedure. The said office staff was duly compensated for the extra work.

Table 1 reveals that from 2009 to 2024, 60 MAG graduates from the case institution took the GCLE. The highest number of examinees was registered in 2012, while the fewest were in 2018 and 2022. One repeater in four first-time-taker examinees and about two female examinees for every male were registered. More than half of the examinees were psychology graduates.

**Table 1:** Number of GCLE Examinees from the Case Institution from 2009 to 2024

Year	N	Examinee Classification		Sex		Undergraduate Degree	
		First-time Takers	Repeaters	Males	Females	Psychology	Non-psychology
2009	5	5	0	0	5	3	2
2010	2	2	0	0	2	2	0
2011	4	2	2	0	4	1	3
2012	12	7	5	3	9	5	6*
2013	9	8	1	0	9	6	3
2014	7	5	2	1	6	4	3
2015	4	4	0	4	0	3	1
2016	5	5	0	5	0	5	0
2017	2	1	1	1	1	2	0
2018	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
2022	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
2023	3	3	0	1	2	1	2
2024	5	4	1	5	0	1	4
<b>13-Year Data</b>	60	48 (80.00%)	12 (20.00%)	21 (35.00%)	39 (65.00%)	34 (56.67%)	19 (31.67%)

\*One examinee cannot be traced in terms of undergraduate degree

To compare passing rates at the case institution with national passing rates and further disaggregate these comparisons by examinee classification (first-time taker vs. repeater), sex, and undergraduate degree, chi-square tests of independence were employed. This statistical test was chosen due to the categorical nature of the passing/failing outcome and the need to analyse frequencies across these subgroups. For the comparison of mean scores across the six areas of

the GCLE, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Where statistically significant differences were identified in the ANOVA, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test was applied to determine which specific group means differed significantly. All statistical analyses, including the chi-square tests and ANOVA, were performed using online statistical calculators. Table 2 shows how passing rates were interpreted based on the range of ratings:

**Table 2:** Interpretation of Passing Rates

Range	Interpretation
81 - 100%	Very High
61 - 80%	High
41 - 60%	Moderate
21 - 40%	Low
0 - 20%	Very Low

## Results

### Thirteen-Year Performance of MAG Graduates in the GCLE

It can be gleaned from Table 3 that for 13 years, the MAG graduates from the case institution registered a high passing rate of 71.67%. Interestingly, the case institution registered a 100% passing rate in six examination years, even as passing rates were low in two schedules. In the remaining five examination schedules, a high passing rate was registered.

### Thirteen-Year GCLE Passing Rate of MAG Graduates vis-à-vis the National GCLE Performance

Overall, the 13-year institutional passing rate (IPR) has surpassed the national passing rate (NPR) by 13.06%. This finding is revealed in Table 4 (next page). While the institutional data show an aggregated passing rate to be high, that of the national data was moderate. The IPR has surpassed the NPR in all but two examination schedules. The NPRs were higher than the IPRs in 2009 and 2011.

**Table 3:** Thirteen-Year Performance of MAG Graduates in the GCLE

Year	N	Passers	Non-passers	Passing %	Interpretation
2009	5	2	3	40.00	Low
2010	2	2	0	100.00	Very High
2011	4	1	3	25.00	Low
2012	12	8	4	66.67	High
2013	9	6	3	66.67	High
2014	7	5	2	71.43	High
2015	4	4	0	100.00	Very High
2016	5	4	1	80.00	High
2017	2	2	0	100.00	Very High
2018	1	1	0	100.00	Very High
2022	1	1	0	100.00	Very High
2023	3	3	0	100.00	Very High
2024	5	4	1	80.00	High
13-Year Data	60	43	17	71.67	High

It must be recalled that these examination years were when the institutional graduates registered a low passing rate. The results can be explained by the fact that the institution first had GCLE takers in 2009, which could influence the results. On the other hand, the low performance in the 2011 GCLE could be due to the profile of the examinees, where 50% are repeaters, and 75% are non-psychology graduates. The institutions' higher performance relative to the national data offers some excellent news. In the analysis of the national trends in GCLE performance from 2008 to 2013, the case institution produced the highest number of

registered guidance counsellors in the region, and the fifth highest producer nationwide (12). Also, according to the same report, the case institution is one of only three public institutions in the top ten with the highest number of topnotchers. The other two are campuses of the University of the Philippines.

The IPR result is higher than the NPR, and a performance at par with the top ten best institutional performers indicates the quality of the institution's MAG program. The excellent results also demonstrate the program's adherence to the highest standards and quality instruction.

**Table 4:** Comparison of the 13-Year GCLE Performance of MAG Graduates in Institutional Versus the National Performance

Year	Institutional		National		Difference
	Passing %	Interpretation	Passing %	Interpretation	
2009	40.00	Low	72.22	High	-32.22
2010	100.00	Very High	60.00	Moderate	40.00
2011	25.00	Low	50.20	Moderate	-25.20
2012	66.67	High	55.06	Moderate	11.61
2013	66.67	High	41.12	Moderate	25.55
2014	71.43	High	65.16	High	6.27
2015	100.00	Very High	60.14	High	39.86
2016	80.00	High	61.28	High	18.72
2017	100.00	Very High	65.14	High	34.86
2018	100.00	Very High	65.18	High	34.82
2022	100.00	Very High	61.27	High	38.73
2023	100.00	Very High	52.77	Moderate	47.23
2024	80.00	High	52.77	Moderate	21.37
13-Year Data	71.67	High	58.63	Moderate	13.06

$p = .041$ , Chi-square,  $.05, 1 = 4.173$

#### Institutional Performance along the Six Areas of GCLE

Figure 2 shows the MAG graduates' accumulated performance along the six GCLE areas. Considering general ratings of the examinees, the 13-year

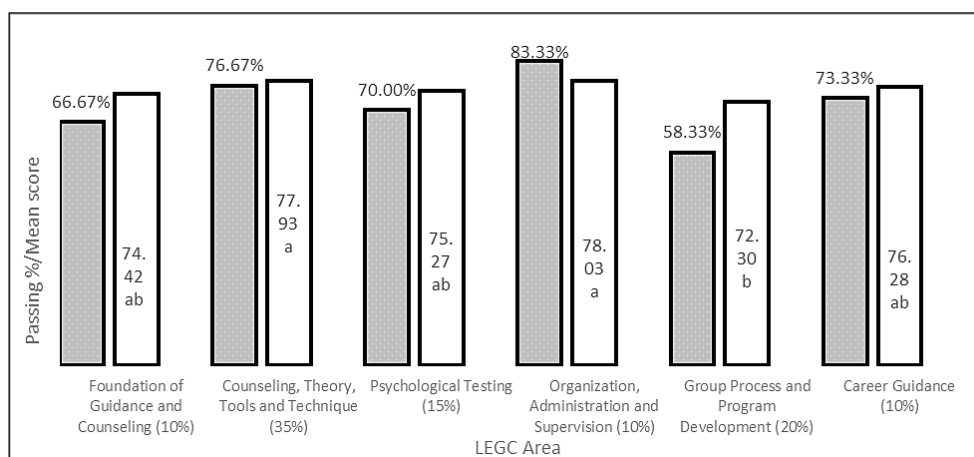
performance of the MAG graduates significantly differs ( $X^2 = 4.17$ ,  $p = .041$ ). Using the chi-square test, there is likewise a significant difference in the mean performance along the six areas, following

one-way analysis of variance ( $F_{5,354} = 3.37$ ,  $F_{crit} = 2.24$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

Comparing the MAG graduates' performance along the six GCLE areas, average passing rates and mean ratings were highest under Organization, Administration, and Supervision. In nine examinations, passing rates were 100% in this examination area. This area, however, accounts for only 10% of the GCLE generating rating. Even if the participants perform well in this area, the effect on their general ratings would not be that huge. The second-best performance was registered in

counselling theory, tools, and techniques, which, fortunately, takes the highest weight (35%) in the GCLE. In this area, passing rates were 100% in seven examinations.

The area where the MAG graduates performed lowest was group process and program development, constituting 20% of the exam. This finding implies that this area is the most challenging for the GCLE examinees. Although the passing rates in this area are 100% in six examinations, the 11.11% passing rate in the 2013 examination could have pulled the overall rating.



Tukey's HSD values with the same letter are not significantly different at  $p = .05$ .

**Figure 2:** MAG Graduates' Performance in the Six Areas in the GCLE

### Difference in the GCLE Overall and Area Performance According to Examinee

#### Classification, Sex, and Undergraduate Degree

As shown in Table 5, there is a significant difference in the overall GCLE performance of the MAG graduates compared to examinee classification and undergraduate degree. Overall, the first-time takers and the psychology graduates performed better in passing rates and ratings than their counterparts. A more granular analysis of the results among first-time takers and repeaters shows a significant difference across all six areas. Regarding undergraduate degrees, the difference in performance among psychology and non-psychology graduates significantly differs in all areas, except in Area 4 (Organization,

Administration, and Supervision of Guidance). When compared by the examinees' sex, there is no significant difference in overall and area performances in the GCLE. The male and female examinees performed similarly. The sex of the examinee is therefore a non-significant factor in the performance in the GCLE. Interestingly, however, it is notable that while the overall mean ratings of the female examinees are slightly higher, the trend tends to be reversed regarding passing rates. Such results imply that the female examinees may have higher ratings, but these ratings tend to be more spread, with many ratings lower than the passing score. Meanwhile, the male examinees may have lower ratings, but their scores may be within the passing score.

**Table 5:** Performance Along with Examinee Classification, Sex, and Undergraduate Degree

Table 1. Performance of First-time Takers, Repeaters, and Difference in Examinee Classification, Sex, and Undergraduate Degree															
Variables	n	Area 1		Area 2		Area 3		Area 4		Area 5		Area 6		Overall	
		Passing %	Mean	Passing %	Mean	Passing %	Mean	Passing %	Mean	Passing %	Mean	Passing %	Mean	Passing %	Mean
Examinee Classification															
First-time Takers	48	70.83 (#5)	76.17 (#5)	85.42 (#2)	80.33 (#1)	77.08 (#3.5)	77.63 (#4)	93.75 (#1)	79.85 (#2)	64.58 (#6)	74.98 (#6)	77.08 (#3.5)	77.67 (#3)	81.25	78.06
Repeaters	12	41.67 (#1)	67.42 (#4)	33.33 (#3.5)	68.33 (#3)	33.33 (#3.5)	65.93 (#5)	33.33 (#3.5)	70.75 (#1.5)	16.67 (#6)	61.58 (#6)	33.33 (#3.5)	70.75 (#1.5)	25.00	67.00
Difference		29.16	8.75	52.09	12	43.75	11.7	60.42	9.1	47.91	13.4	43.75	6.92	56.25	11.06
p - value		<.05		<.05		<.05		<.05		<.05		<.05		<.05	
Sex															
Males	11	81.82 (#2.5)	77.18 (#2)	81.82 (#2.5)	76.18 (#3)	72.73 (#4)	73.00 (#5)	90.91 (#1)	77.27 (#1)	63.64 (#5.5)	72.09 (#6)	63.64 (#5.5)	75.64 (#4)	81.82	75.04
Females	49	62.37 (#5)	73.80 (#5)	75.51 (#2.5)	78.33 (#1)	69.39 (#4)	75.78 (#4)	81.63 (#1)	78.20 (#2)	57.14 (#6)	72.35 (#6)	75.51 (#2.5)	76.43 (#3)	69.39	76.03
Difference		19.45	3.38	6.31	-2.15	3.34	-2.78	9.28	-0.93	6.5	-0.26	-11.87	-0.79	12.43	-0.99
p - value		>.05		>.05		>.05		>.05		>.05		>.05		>.05	
Undergraduate Degree															
Psychology	34	79.41 (#4.5)	77.29 (#5)	91.18 (#1)	82.09 (#1)	85.29 (#2.5)	80.15 (#2)	85.29 (#2.5)	79.41 (#3)	70.59 (#6)	76.18 (#6)	79.41 (#4.5)	78.41 (#4)	82.35	79.53
Non-Psychology	25	48.00 (#4.5)	71.32 (#4)	56.00 (#2)	73.12 (#3)	48.00 (#4.5)	68.68 (#5)	80.00 (#1)	76.40 (#1)	36.00 (#6)	67.16 (#6)	52.00 (#3)	73.36 (#2)	56.00	71.27
Difference		31.41	5.97	35.18	8.97	37.29	11.47	5.29	3.01	34.59	9.02	27.41	5.05	26.35	8.26
p - value		<.05		<.05		<.05		>.05		<.05		<.05		<.05	

Area 1 - Foundation of Guidance and Counselling, Area 2 - Counselling, Theory, Tools and Technique, Area 3 Psychological Testing, Area 4 - Organization, Administration and Supervision, Area 5 - Group Process and Program Development, Area 6 - Career Guidance

## Discussion

The consistently strong performance of the case institution's Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG) graduates in the Licensure Examination for Guidance Counsellors (GCLE) over 13 years paints a clear picture of a highly effective and robust program. This strong performance is seen to continuously improve through the years, as indicated by an upward trend in performance. The high and increasing institutional IPR, significantly exceeding the moderate national passing rate (NPR), speaks volumes about the quality of education and preparation offered. This sustained success, including six examination years with a perfect 100% passing rate, points to several key contributing factors: a dedicated faculty, a sound admission and retention policy, and highly motivated students. These elements collectively create an environment conducive to academic excellence and professional readiness. The institution must consider employing other mechanisms to maintain or further improve the MAG graduates' performance in the GCLE. It may consider doing a curriculum review to focus on relevance, providing professional development activities to its core faculty members, and providing a more focused review or competency audit to its graduates.

The high overall passing rate observed in the case institution can be primarily attributed to the superior performance of two cohorts: first-time licensure examination takers and psychology program graduates. The higher representation of these groups among this institution's total examinees significantly influenced the overall institutional performance.

The institution's superior performance is not just about high passing rates. It is also about its significant contribution to the guidance and counselling profession nationwide. The program excels as the region's highest producer of registered guidance counsellors, ranking fifth nationwide. It is also notable for being one of only three public institutions with the most topnotchers. These achievements collectively underscore its vital role in addressing the demand for qualified professionals. This exceptional standing confirms the MAG program's adherence to the highest standards of quality instruction.

Detailed performance analysis across the six GCLE areas offers actionable recommendations for

curriculum enhancement. The program should continue emphasizing "Organization, administration, and supervision" and "Counselling theory, tools and techniques," where examinees performed best. Conversely, "Group process and program development" requires more focused, in-depth, and intensive instruction because it is the most challenging area. Coaching on high-weight areas like "Counselling theory, tools, and techniques" should also be maintained.

While the overall result is overwhelmingly positive, a closer look at specific examination years and areas reveals important trends. The lower passing rates in 2009 and 2011, where the NPR surpassed the IPR, offer valuable insights. The 2009 decrease could be attributed to the institution's first GCLE takers, suggesting necessary initial adjustments. The 2011 dip, however, points to the examinee profile, comprising 50% repeaters and 75% non-psychology graduates. This finding strongly suggests that prior academic background and exam-taking experience significantly influence performance. The inherent advantage of first-time takers is a recurring theme in licensure examinations. This trend is true in many disciplines, including teacher education, librarian and information science, criminology, nursing, and psychometry (1,14, 15-18). The message is clear, *i.e.*, repeating licensure examinations do not necessarily give the examinees an advantage over the first-time takers.

The GCLE also tends to favour those with a complete background in psychology over those without or with a small quantity of background. This result could be explained by the fact that guidance and counselling are more related to psychology than any other field. Effective guidance counsellors incorporate psychological theories and principles (25, 26). Such results reinforce the importance of a solid foundational psychological understanding for guidance and counselling practitioners.

Sex, meanwhile, emerged as a non-significant determinant of performance in the GCLE. This finding suggests that the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies for practical guidance and counselling are gender-independent. This result aligns with existing literature on various Philippine licensure examinations, where examinee sex has similarly been found to be non-



influential, including studies on librarians, criminologists, and professionals in fields such as fisheries, education, agriculture, and accountancy (17, 20, 21).

The findings regarding examinee classification and undergraduate degree have significant implications for the MAG program's admission and recruitment policies. The higher performance of first-time takers and psychology graduates strongly suggests prioritizing applicants with a strong psychology background. It also entails potentially implementing strategies to better prepare repeaters or those from non-psychology disciplines. This recommendation does not necessarily mean excluding non-psychology graduates but acknowledging the potential need for supplementary coursework or focused review.

## Conclusion

The Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG) program at the case institution consistently and continuously demonstrates excellence. This strong performance underscores the program's adherence to high standards, quality instruction, and the dedication of both faculty and motivated students. The institution is the highest producer of registered guidance counsellors in the region and fifth nationwide, and is one of only three public institutions among the top ten for topnotchers, further validating the program's robust quality. This study also established the importance of foundational knowledge in psychology and the advantage of mastering the competencies in the six GCLE areas. Intensive preparation and instruction are essential for MAG students and faculty members, as repeating the GCLE is not advantageous. These points suggest that while the MAG program is highly successful, targeted interventions in specific content areas and continued attention to admissions policies can further optimize student outcomes in the Licensure Examination for Guidance Counsellors (GCLE).

## Abbreviations

GCLE: Guidance Counsellors Licensure Examination, MAG: Master of Arts in Guidance.

## Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Dean of the College of Teacher Education for facilitating the request for the result of the LEGC from the local office of the

Philippine Professional Regulations Commission. We are likewise grateful to the office staff for transforming the original data into a non-identifiable file.

## Author Contributions

Dona Claire L. Colinang: data gathering, polishing the manuscript, Erlyn Honeylette C. Marquez: data analysis, polishing of the manuscript, Jean Janette V. De Joya: manuscript preparation, Apler J. Bansiong: data gathering, analysis, manuscript preparation, polishing.

## Conflict of Interest

No authors declare conflict of interest for this study.

## Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The researchers utilized Grammarly in checking the language used in this research. Quillbot was also used to improve manuscript coherence and organization.

## Ethics Approval

No human or animal subjects were directly involved in this study, as it solely used archival data that is also readily available online. Also, as per guidelines from the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (2022), institutional quality assurance, such as licensure examination results analysis, is exempted from ethics review. However, all ethical procedures, particularly anonymity and confidentiality, were strictly observed. (Please check the methodology section.)

## Funding

No specific funding was received for the conduct of this study

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**How to Cite:** Colinang DCL, Marquez EHC, De Joya JJV, Bansiong AJ. Thirteen-Year- Guidance Counsellors Licensure Examination (GCLE) Performance of the Master of Arts in Guidance (MAG) Graduates: The Case of a Philippine State Institution. *Int Res J Multidiscip Scope*. 7(1): 327-337.  
DOI: 10.47857/irjms.2026.v07i01.06867