

Theoretical Construction and Practical Path of the Collaborative Education Mechanism between Graduate Counselors and Class Advisors under the Three-in-One Holistic Education System

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Abstract: With the continuous expansion of China's graduate education system and the diversification of training models, the new era has raised higher requirements for cultivating high-level talents. Under the "Three-in-One Holistic Education" framework, structural deficiencies in the ideological and political education management system for graduate students have emerged, where the lack of collaborative mechanisms among educational stakeholders hinders educational effectiveness. This study focuses on the coordination mechanism between graduate student counselors and class advisors, constructing a theoretically coherent and practically feasible collaborative education model. From a functionalist perspective, the research demonstrates the necessity and feasibility of introducing the "graduate class advisor" role, positioning it as a pivotal hub. Building upon this foundation, a five-dimensional collaborative education mechanism model is proposed, achieving optimized allocation of educational resources and enhanced effectiveness. This study provides a theoretical framework to address challenges in ideological and political education, offers practical pathways and policy insights for universities to establish educational management systems, and holds significant implications for deepening the "Three-in-One Holistic Education" reform and cultivating high-level talents.

Keywords: Holistic education; Graduate class advisor; Collaborative education; Functionalism

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1. Introduction

The demand for high-level innovative talents in the new era is becoming increasingly urgent, highlighting the strategic importance of graduate education. The "Three-in-One Holistic Education" concept—encompassing all-staff involvement, whole-process engagement, and comprehensive cultivation—has evolved from a macro-level advocacy into a systematic project for internal governance and educational practices in universities, requiring

the dismantling of barriers between educational entities to form a cohesive educational synergy ^[1]. However, the implementation of this “Three-in-One Holistic Education” system in graduate programs faces multiple challenges. The traditional management model combining “primary responsibility of supervisors” with “graduate counselors” exhibits limitations in educational efficacy and structural flaws. Graduate counselors, preoccupied with routine administrative tasks, struggle to deeply engage with students’ academic and psychological worlds; supervisors, primarily focused on academic guidance, often neglect ideological and moral education, leading to a disconnect between academic training and ideological cultivation. Some universities have explored establishing “graduate class advisors” positions, yet theoretical discussions remain insufficient regarding the necessity and feasibility of this addition, role definition, functional boundaries, and collaborative education mechanisms ^[2]. Academic research predominantly focuses on enhancing graduate counselors’ responsibilities and capabilities, as well as collaborative education models between counselors and supervisors, while the theoretical exploration of “graduate class advisors” remains scarce. Few analyses clarify the collaborative mechanisms between counselors and class advisors, and existing discussions often confuse the two concepts without clear functional distinctions or theoretical frameworks. The lag in theoretical research leaves practical explorations without effective guidance, making them prone to falling into the dilemma of conflicting responsibilities and collaborative challenges ^[3].

Guided by the “Three-in-One Holistic Education” philosophy and functionalism theory, this study investigates the collaborative education mechanism between graduate counselors and class advisors. Its core contributions include: (1) demonstrating the theoretical necessity and feasibility of establishing graduate class advisors with precise positioning; (2) developing a five-dimensional collaborative education framework to provide a theoretical basis for university practice. The research aims to pioneer new approaches in graduate ideological and political education through theoretical innovation.

2. Theoretical basis of the establishment of graduate class advisors: A functionalist perspective

Before examining collaborative education mechanisms, it is essential to clarify whether the introduction of “graduate class advisors” has theoretical justification. This section analyzes the necessity and feasibility of this role from three dimensions: systemic requirements, functional differentiation, and complementary roles, employing a functionalist perspective. Functionalism posits that every component in a social system exists to fulfill specific functional needs, and the emergence of new roles often addresses functional dysfunctions or gaps within the system ^[4].

2.1. System requirements: New challenges in the educational function triggered by the high-quality development of postgraduate education

The postgraduate education system in the new era faces external pressures and internal tensions, creating demands for optimizing its educational functions. Firstly, the expansion of postgraduate enrollment and structural diversification require more refined management. The traditional “one-size-fits-all” management model has become unsustainable, with counselors’ attention being diverted and the educational system experiencing a “functional deficit” ^[5]. Secondly, the deepening of moral education tasks demands higher professional expertise. Ideological and political education needs to be integrated into talent cultivation processes. However, most counselors lack disciplinary backgrounds matching postgraduate majors, while mentors focus on “academic guidance,” resulting in a functional gap between “professionalism and academic

ideological education.” Thirdly, postgraduates face significant academic, research, and employment pressures, with prominent psychological and career issues. Although counselors provide psychological counseling and employment information, their suggestions lack depth in specific disciplines. Mentors, despite understanding industry trends, struggle to promptly identify students’ emotional and psychological needs, leading to inadequate “academic-career integrated counseling” functions^[6,7]. Simply increasing counselor numbers or strengthening mentors’ responsibilities cannot fundamentally solve these problems. The system requires structural adjustments and the introduction of new roles to address functional shortcomings.

2.2. Functional differentiation: Theoretical positioning of graduate class advisors as professional educators

Functionalism theory posits that the evolutionary trajectory of social systems lies in functional specialization to enhance efficiency and adaptability. Within the graduate education framework, the introduction of class advisors serves as a pivotal mechanism for refining educational functions. Their core mission is neither to replicate undergraduate advisors’ models nor to function as “second counselors” or “quasi-mentors,” but rather to bridge the gap between counselors and mentors by acting as “professional educators” and “collaborative hubs for student development.”

First, as the “pioneer of academic ideological and political education,” graduate class advisors are appointed from young and middle-aged professional faculty members. Their alignment with students’ disciplinary backgrounds enables the integration of ideological value guidance into academic activities, thereby transmitting political and ideological elements and addressing the shortcomings in the functionality of “academic ideological and political education.”

Secondly, as a “navigator of academic career,” the graduate class advisor is positioned during the academic advancement phase, providing targeted academic planning, research methodology guidance, and career development analysis for graduate students. This complements the limitations of career counseling by advisors, alleviates some of the pressure on supervisors, and achieves comprehensive academic navigation throughout the entire academic cycle.

Finally, as the “cohesive force in collective development,” the homeroom teacher faces the class collective, fostering an academic atmosphere through organized activities, promoting peer assistance and cooperation, reinforcing collectivist education, and cultivating teamwork skills, thereby serving as a crucial supplementary force in collective development.

2.3. Role complementarity and feasibility: Constructing a new pattern of education with “three driving forces”

The introduction of graduate student class advisors is not only theoretically necessary but also practically forms a complementary “iron triangle” relationship with counselors and supervisors. Young and middle-aged faculty members in universities constitute a valuable talent pool. By establishing scientific mechanisms for recruitment, training, evaluation, and incentives, their enthusiasm can be fully mobilized to ensure the professionalism and sustainability of class advisor work. This approach is financially and human resource-wise feasible, with its core lying in institutional design.

From the perspective of role complementarity, counselors, homeroom teachers, and mentors form an educational community with clearly defined responsibilities and complementary functions. Counselors focus on macro-level ideological and political education, mentors concentrate on cultivating scientific research and

innovation capabilities, while homeroom teachers, as meso-level connectors, integrate ideological-political requirements with academic guidance to conduct refined educational management.

This “triple-engine” framework has transformed the traditional “dual-track” approach, where counselors and mentors operated independently, freeing counselors from complex academic responsibilities. The decoupling allows ideological and political education to focus on its core mission, while mentors concentrate on research guidance and class advisors become students’ academic mentors^[8,9]. Through information sharing, the three parties can comprehensively address graduate students’ challenges with seamless coverage and full-chain responses, implementing the “holistic education” philosophy. From a functional perspective, establishing graduate class advisors represents a viable solution to educational challenges, optimizes system efficiency, and drives high-quality development.

3. Practical path of collaborative education mechanism: From role division to system integration

An effective collaborative education mechanism constitutes a multidimensional organic system. Grounded in systems theory, this study proposes a five-dimensional collaborative education model featuring complementary roles, clearly defined responsibilities, seamless processes, information sharing, and evaluation-driven approaches, thereby integrating counselors and homeroom teachers into an efficient educational unit^[10,11].

3.1. Dimension 1: Division of labor and complementarity and clear rights and responsibilities—the basis of coordination

The institutionalization and public disclosure of the list of responsibilities and rights are crucial for the effective implementation of the division of labor. Universities should establish relevant regulations on job responsibilities to clarify the educational obligations of both parties. This list must be made available to all graduate students and their supervisors to prevent situations where students have no recourse or must seek help from multiple parties, thereby avoiding phenomena such as “passing the buck” and providing a basis for subsequent work.

3.2. Dimension 2: Process connection—path of collaboration

The process coordination mechanism integrates the work of counselors and class advisors into a closed loop, requiring standardized workflows embedded throughout graduate education. First, the freshman orientation and adaptation process. A “counselor-class advisor joint welcome” mechanism is established, where counselors oversee macro-level orientation while advisors handle specialized education. Together, they organize meet-and-greet sessions and in-depth interviews, creating “one file per student” records and compiling lists of students requiring special attention. Second, the academic progress and ideological monitoring process. A “counselor-class advisor regular consultation” system is implemented, with monthly meetings where advisors report class updates and counselors communicate school policies. Both parties jointly analyze issues and develop solutions to prevent information silos. Finally, the crisis early warning and intervention process. A tiered response and coordinated intervention system is established. The “first responder” conducts initial assessment and communication, handling routine issues independently, while severe cases require reporting within 24 hours. The college activates emergency plans, ensuring close collaboration during resolution and conducting post-event reviews.

3.3. Dimension 3: Information sharing—the bloodline of collaboration

Efficient information sharing is the lifeline for collaborative efficiency. To break down data barriers, we should establish a secure, convenient, and efficient information-sharing platform. This platform can be built on existing systems or through dedicated software, comprising four key modules: (1) Student Information Module: Contains academic records, research achievements, and related data. Counselors and homeroom teachers can input, access, and update information according to their permissions. Conversation records with different focuses collectively sketch students' growth profiles. (2) Work Log and Memo Module: Allows counselors and homeroom teachers to regularly document important tasks. The system features reminder functions to ensure follow-up. (3) Collaborative Task Module: Enables the posting of tasks requiring joint efforts, achieving full-process visual management. (4) Knowledge Base Module: Aggregates school regulations, case studies, and other resources for easy reference and learning, enhancing professional work standards. Information sharing helps accurately address student issues.

3.4. Dimension 4: Capacity building—the guarantee of synergy

Collaborative education requires the establishment of a joint training and capacity-building mechanism to ensure that training content achieves bidirectional complementarity. By organizing workshops and other activities, mutual development can be promoted, thereby forming a unified educational philosophy^[12,13].

3.5. Dimension 5: Evaluation-driven—the engine of synergy

Reform the evaluation system by incorporating “collaborative education outcomes” into assessment criteria. First, for homeroom teachers: The evaluation should balance educational effectiveness through multi-dimensional metrics, with policy incentives and honors for outstanding performers. Second, for counselors: The assessment should include indicators for supporting homeroom teachers, encouraging collaborative teamwork. Third, for collaborative teams: Establish an “Outstanding Education Team Award” based on overall team development to strengthen members' sense of community^[14,15].

In short, the five-dimensional collaborative education mechanism model provides a systematic solution, unites the educational stakeholders, and advances the practice of holistic education.

4. Conclusion and outlook

In the high-quality development phase of graduate education, deepening the “Three-in-One Holistic Education” reform and building a collaborative education system have become major challenges. This study focuses on the structural issue of collaborative education entities, particularly the coordination mechanism between graduate advisors and class advisors. Through theoretical analysis and model construction, the research concludes: First, from a functionalist perspective, under the increasingly complex and specialized demands of the graduate education system, adding class advisors appointed by academic faculty is both theoretically necessary and practically feasible. These advisors fill functional gaps such as “academic ideological education,” serving as a critical bridge between ideological education and professional training, thereby contributing to a new “three-horse-drawn carriage” education model. Second, establishing a systematic collaborative education mechanism is the fundamental solution to practical challenges. The study proposes a five-dimensional collaborative education model featuring “complementary roles, clear responsibilities, streamlined processes, information sharing, and evaluation-driven approaches.” It designs a closed-loop system for collaborative work between advisors and class advisors, achieving optimized allocation and enhanced efficiency of educational resources.

The study theoretically establishes a systematic framework for the “graduate class advisor” role, constructs a theoretical model of collaborative education mechanisms, and deepens the understanding of the “Three-in-One Holistic Education” principle. Practically, it offers references and recommendations for reforming graduate education in universities, such as promoting the establishment of a class advisor system, clarifying authority and responsibility lists, and introducing “collaborative education effectiveness” evaluation indicators.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the validity and generalizability of the theoretical model require empirical validation, and future research could employ multiple methods for longitudinal evaluation. Secondly, while the research primarily focuses on the binary collaboration between academic advisors and class advisors, it lacks in-depth integration of mentorship resources. Future work should develop a multi-stakeholder networked model. Thirdly, given the varying needs of graduate students across disciplines and training types, the implementation details of collaborative education mechanisms require adaptive adjustments, which could be explored through categorized approaches. Despite these limitations, the study provides an innovative theoretical framework to address the “collaborative dilemma” in graduate ideological and political education. With ongoing research and practice, we believe a new collaborative education paradigm for graduate students—one with clear responsibilities and efficient operations—will emerge, offering institutional safeguards for cultivating new-era talents.

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