

Analysis and Enlightenment of the Current Situation of Student Affairs Management in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: Student affairs play a crucial role in higher education institutions in university education. This paper aims to elucidate the development history and characteristics of student affairs management in universities at home and abroad, proposing some experiences that Chinese universities can draw upon. It advocates for the establishment of the concepts of “serving students” and “developing students,” with a focus on addressing students’ needs and fostering their growth. It emphasizes enhancing students’ self-management abilities and nurturing their autonomy and sense of responsibility.

Keywords: Student affairs; Serving students; Enlightenment

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1. The development of student affairs management in universities

1.1. The development of student affairs management in foreign universities

According to studies by Long J *et al.* (2022), the evolution of student affairs management in the history of American higher education can be delineated into four stages: the embryonic period, the developmental period, the transformative period, and the student development-focused period^[1]. During the embryonic period, the predominant theoretical framework of student affairs management revolved around the “Substitute parenting model.” This theory posited that schools should assume a parental role, providing guidance for students’ living arrangements and behaviors. The developmental period marked the second stage of student affairs management, characterized by the dominance of the “Student personnel work” theory. This theory emphasizes individual differences among students and personal development, aiming to assist students in overcoming personal challenges and facilitating their growth through adaptive support and counseling. The transformative period constituted the third stage of student affairs management, guided by the “Student services” theory. This theory underscored the importance of student engagement and personal development, advocating for the provision of comprehensive support services to foster students’ holistic development and success. In the present day, student affairs management has entered a period focused on student development, with the “Student development” theory

as its guiding framework. This theory posits students as active learners, suggesting that schools should create environments rich in challenges and developmental opportunities to stimulate students' autonomy and motivation for learning. It aims to cultivate students' self-awareness, leadership abilities and professional ethics ^[2].

1.2. The development of student affairs management in Chinese university

In general, there has been a significant shift in student affairs management in Chinese universities, with early university student affairs management closely related to the national economy and key development initiatives. This characteristic hinders the development of higher education ^[3]. Influenced by the policies of reform and opening-up, Chinese universities gradually began adjusting the philosophies and objectives of student affairs work towards cultivating “Four-All-Around” individuals and guiding campus cultural activities. Moreover, many universities, under the guidance of professionalization and vocationalization, intensified ideological and political education efforts and enhanced the role of management functions within student affairs. The Ministry of Education of China promulgated interim regulations on student academic record management in 1978 and the student code of conduct in 1982, aiming to standardize student affairs work and strengthen management functions. In the 21st century, driven by the effects of economic globalization and intensified collaboration between domestic and foreign universities, Chinese universities have gradually embraced an integrated approach to student affairs management, emphasizing education, management and service. This process has seen an enhancement of student agency, characterized by a student-centric ideology. Simultaneously, the scope of student affairs has expanded, with the majority of universities providing various services such as employment guidance, psychological support, living assistance and safety measures. In terms of faculty management, the ranks of university counselors are becoming more standardized and professionalized, while ideological and political education is further refined ^[4]. In the present day, student affairs management in Chinese universities primarily encompasses three aspects: educational dimensions including moral education, party education, and activity-based ideological and political education; management dimensions focusing on standardization, including class construction and management; and service dimensions guided by student needs, including psychological health, career guidance, social practice, and guidance on campus culture and academic pursuits ^[5].

2. Current situation of student affairs management in universities

2.1. Current situation of student affairs management in foreign universities

Until now, student affairs management in many foreign universities has undergone extensive development. According to research by Yuan Y *et al.* (2022), student affairs in foreign universities are characterized by a clear and detailed division of labor, with specialized consulting agencies providing students with professional advice including academic, personal and career counseling. Additionally, schools have student affairs offices responsible for managing various matters such as new student enrollment and registration, physical and mental health, academic advising and career guidance ^[6]. In terms of methods and approaches to student affairs management, foreign universities emphasize a “student-centered” approach, placing students at the center of management, respecting their rights and opinions, and encouraging their active participation in self-education and self-management processes ^[7].

However, despite these efforts, most foreign universities still face challenges. For instance, uneven allocation of resources in higher education institutions poses difficulties for student affairs management, particularly in schools located in regions where higher education resources are relatively scarce, resulting in inadequate support for student affairs due to limitations in human, financial and material resources ^[8]. What's worse, cultural differences and conflicts are prominent issues, as cultural disparities among different countries

and regions may lead to conflicts in the execution of student affairs management. This includes understanding student needs, selecting service methods and formulating management strategies, all of which require staff to possess cross-cultural communication and understanding skills ^[9].

2.2. Current situation of student affairs management in Chinese universities

After a long period of development and learning from international experiences, student affairs management in Chinese universities has demonstrated systematic and profound characteristics. The management of student affairs in Chinese universities is characterized by internal school-based management ^[10], centralized leadership by the school party committee, hierarchical management from departments to grades and classes and a combination of regulations and blocks, with regulations playing a primary role. This systematic management model ensures comprehensive coverage of student affairs, overall work coordination and efficient management of data, statistics and analysis. Moreover, student affairs management in Chinese universities emphasizes the holistic development of students, prioritizing general education and aiming to cultivate students' personalities. Universities not only focus on students' academic achievements but also emphasize the cultivation of students' moral character, artistic literacy and sense of social responsibility ^[11].

According to Feng Y's (2023) research, one of the most prominent issues is that many universities continue to undervalue and inadequately comprehend the importance of student affairs management ^[9]. Many university administrators and faculty members consider student affairs management to be a simple, temporary, service-oriented task that does not require standardization or division of responsibilities and believe that anyone can handle it. Consequently, many universities overlook the necessity of professional training and education when selecting and appointing personnel responsible for student affairs-related tasks. Additionally, according to research by Wang H *et al.* (2023), some universities in China still fail to consider the actual situation of students in their student affairs management work. Many counselors approach management content and modes from the perspective of managers, neglecting factors such as students' personality traits, academic levels, autonomy, and moral values, thus suppressing students' subjective initiative ^[10,12].

3. Enlightenment into student affairs management in Chinese universities

The student affairs management model in Chinese universities faces a series of challenges, including incomplete management systems and a relatively low level of professionalism among management personnel. In order to enhance student affairs management in Chinese universities and promote the comprehensive development of students, we can draw insights from the characteristics of student affairs management in the United States and implement improvements in the following areas:

3.1. Establishing the concepts of “Serving students” and “Developing students”

Firstly, Chinese universities can establish comprehensive student service systems. Domestic universities can establish dedicated student service departments responsible for addressing various student issues and needs, including accommodation, dining, health, and psychological support. These departments provide one-stop services, enabling students to address their problems conveniently ^[13].

Secondly, Chinese universities can offer diversified student service programs, including academic support, cultural activities and social practices. These programs enrich students' extracurricular lives and promote comprehensive development. In the future, Chinese universities can learn from this practice and launch more diverse student service programs to meet students' diverse needs. In addition to student services, Chinese universities should also focus on student development. Foreign universities typically prioritize students'

personal development by organizing various extracurricular activities and projects to help students explore themselves and realize their potential. For example, schools organize various club activities, volunteer service projects, international exchange programs, etc., providing students with opportunities to participate and enrich their life experiences. At the same time, American universities also provide personalized academic guidance and career planning services to help students develop learning and career plans and achieve personal value. Chinese universities can emulate these practices, attach importance to students' personal development and provide them with more diversified development opportunities and personalized services. For example, schools can establish more club organizations to enrich students' extracurricular activities, launch more volunteer service projects to cultivate students' social responsibility and strengthen academic guidance and career planning to help students better plan their future ^[14].

3.2. Enhancing students' self-management skills

Firstly, Chinese universities can draw lessons from the practices of student autonomy in foreign universities. Students can engage in decision-making processes and manage student organizations and activities by encouraging students to participate in campus management through organizations such as student unions and student councils. This approach helps cultivate students' self-management abilities and enhance their organizational and leadership skills. Chinese universities can emulate this practice by establishing a more comprehensive and rational campus management system, granting students more autonomy, involving them in school governance, and fostering their self-management awareness and abilities.

Secondly, Chinese universities can learn from the experiences of student guidance in foreign universities. In many European and American countries, numerous universities have specialized student guidance centers that provide personalized academic and life counseling services to students. These guidance centers typically offer assistance in areas such as study skills training, time management guidance and problem-solving methods, helping students improve their self-management abilities. Chinese universities can adopt this practice by establishing similar student guidance service systems, providing systematic student guidance services and helping students learn self-management skills such as goal setting, time planning and problem-solving. Moreover, Chinese universities can adopt the experiences of foreign universities in curriculum design to cultivate students' self-management awareness and abilities. For example, offering courses on self-management to teach students skills such as goal setting, time planning and stress management. In addition, organizing related activities such as time management lectures and study skills training to help students enhance their self-management abilities. By offering these courses and activities, students' self-management awareness can be strengthened, and their self-management abilities can be improved, enabling them to better adapt to university life and future career life ^[15].

3.3. Enhancing the professionalism and competence of student affairs practitioners

Firstly, Chinese universities need to value students' internship experience and provide them with a variety of internship opportunities by cooperating with enterprises or setting up special internship practice centers. These internship experiences not only help students apply theoretical knowledge to practice but also develop their professional abilities and work skills. Chinese universities can adopt this practice by establishing a more comprehensive internship system, strengthening cooperation with enterprises, providing more practical opportunities for students and helping them better adapt to future work environments ^[16].

Secondly, Chinese universities can learn from other universities' experiences in vocational education. Many universities offer courses and programs related to professions, such as vocational skills training and industry

certification courses, to help students acquire practical vocational skills. These courses and programs aim to cultivate students' professional ethics and capabilities, enabling them to perform various professional roles in their future careers. Chinese universities can adopt this practice by offering courses and programs related to professions, cultivating students' professional qualities and skills, and enhancing their competitiveness.

Furthermore, Chinese universities should improve their experiences in career guidance. Many universities have specialized career development centers that provide students with personalized career planning and guidance services. These services include career assessments, career planning counseling and job search skills training, helping students better understand their career interests and abilities before developing suitable career development plans. Chinese universities can adopt this practice by establishing similar career development centers, providing personalized career planning and guidance services, and helping students better plan their career development and achieve personal value.

3.4. Enhancing the professionalism of university staff in student affairs

Firstly, Chinese universities should optimize their practices in recruitment and selection. Many foreign universities typically select personnel for student affairs positions through open recruitment or internal selection based on job requirements and professional skills. This ensures that the workers possess the necessary professional knowledge and skills to fulfill their job responsibilities. Chinese universities can emulate this practice by establishing a more scientific and fair recruitment and selection mechanism to attract and select talents with relevant professional knowledge and work experience, thus enhancing the professionalism of student affairs workers.

Secondly, Chinese universities should increase their efforts in training and development. Foreign universities often provide systematic training and development opportunities for student affairs workers, including internal training, external training and professional certification. These training programs aim to continuously improve the workers' professional competence and capabilities, enabling them to adapt to the evolving work environment and demands.

Additionally, Chinese universities should optimize the evaluation and incentive mechanisms. Many foreign universities typically establish scientific and objective performance evaluation systems and formulate corresponding incentive policies and reward mechanisms based on workers' work performance and professional abilities. These incentive measures may include promotions, salary adjustments and honorary titles to motivate workers to improve their professional competence continuously. Chinese universities can learn from this practice by establishing scientific and objective evaluation and incentive mechanisms to provide corresponding incentives and rewards based on student affairs workers' work performance and professional abilities, thereby enhancing their professionalism.

Finally, there should be a focus on enhancing the professional training of counselors and gradually establishing a comprehensive counselor training mechanism. According to Wang K's (2023) research, this will help improve the professional quality and capabilities of student affairs staff^[15].

3.5. Establishing scientific, normative and comprehensive regulations for student affairs

Although legislative progress has been made in student affairs management in Chinese universities, there are still issues regarding incomplete regulations and gaps in legislation. Therefore, universities should first clarify the institution's responsibilities, powers and rights, strengthening the scientific and legal construction of regulations for student affairs management. Secondly, legal consultation institutions should be established to institutionalize management. Internally, universities should establish specialized legal consultation bodies,

student rights protection organizations and student appeal mechanisms to provide legal knowledge consultation and rights protection services to students. Thirdly, regulations should be strictly enforced to achieve procedural standardization. It is essential to abide by laws and regulations strictly and further improve procedures such as evidence collection, prosecution, and hearings, ensuring fairness and procedural compliance.

4. Conclusion

The long-term development of student affairs management in universities at home and abroad has provided abundant experience and insights for us. Chinese universities should build upon the strengths of student affairs management while thoroughly studying and drawing insights from the experiences of American student affairs management. By integrating these experiences with the national context and the actual situation of universities, Chinese universities can innovate and firmly establish a student-centered philosophy, thus propelling student affairs management to a higher level and aligning it more closely with China's characteristics.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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