

# Exploration on the Development Path of Campus Short Dramas: A Case Study of Against the Current

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**Abstract:** The number of users of short dramas has exceeded 500 million. With youth narratives and educational value, the campus genre has become a differentiated direction. Taking *Against the Current*, created by an all-student team, as an example, this paper constructs a logical chain of “theory-practice-problems-pathways” from the perspectives of definition and characteristics, practical process (topic selection, team building, technology, and educational integration), existing problems (ability gap, collaboration difficulties, technical shortcomings, and bottlenecks in communication and commercialization), and optimization strategies (talent training, interdisciplinary collaboration, equipment support, communication matrix, and model innovation), so as to provide theoretical and practical references for the high-quality development of campus short dramas.

**Keywords:** Campus short dramas; *Against the Current*; All-student team; Creative practice

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## 1. Introduction

Driven by media technology innovation and fragmented audience attention, short dramas have boomed rapidly. In 2024, their market scale exceeded 50 billion yuan, making them a core part of young people’s cultural consumption. However, the industry faces problems such as repetitive content and distorted values, which negatively affect teenagers.

Campus short dramas undertake the tasks of youth cultural expression and high-quality content creation, yet current research focuses mostly on commercialization, lacking discussion on their educational and cultural value.

Based on the author’s creation of the campus short drama *Against the Current*, which combines fantasy, growth, and family ethics, this paper shows innovations in theme and technology, including the application of generative AI in response to the “Short Drama +” initiative. It argues that the creation rules of campus short

dramas need systematic research to connect theory and practice.

## **2. Definition of campus short dramas and project introduction**

### **2.1. Conceptual distinction between short dramas and campus short dramas**

Short dramas are developing along two tracks: high-quality horizontal-screen works target wide audiences, while low-cost vertical-screen dramas dominate the mass market but face homogeneity and low success rates. In 2024, regulators introduced a classified review to standardize the industry and promoted innovative development under the “Short Drama +” initiative. Created mainly by students, campus short dramas focus on campus life and youth growth, combining practical and artistic value. Supported by university-enterprise cooperation, they foster interdisciplinary talent, explore low-cost, high-quality production, and have become an important part of the diversified short drama industry ecosystem.

### **2.2. Project introduction**

Supported by the Industry-Education Integration Platform of Dalian Media Group & City Institute and Southern Liaoning Short Drama Industry Research Institute, this teacher-student co-created short drama focuses on family relationships and youth growth. Filming started in November 2024, with 50 horizontal-screen episodes (4–5 minutes each) planned across two seasons, targeting college students and middle-aged women. With a youthful perspective, it deconstructs traditional family narratives and explores an industry-education integration model, offering students full-process practice, promoting regional cultural industry and talent training, and setting a benchmark for “small-scale, high-value” creation.

## **3 Creative practice of the campus short drama against the current**

### **3.1. Topic selection, planning, and theme expression: Focusing on fantasy settings and social pain points**

The creative team adopts the core approach of “fantasy setting + social pain points”, integrating the time-space dislocation concept of “a mother reincarnates at the age of 18 and becomes classmates with her son” into the campus narrative. This not only responds to the market demand for high-conflict and emotionally intense content in short dramas, but also breaks through the flat expression of traditional youth dramas <sup>[2]</sup>.

According to industry research, the high-quality transformation of short dramas should take a user-oriented approach as the core, based on the stratified characteristics of user groups. Targeting college students and middle-aged women aged 18–45, who focus on emotional depth and intergenerational issues, the drama presents the cognitive conflicts between two generations through dual perspectives of mother and son <sup>[1]</sup>. Closely following the policy-oriented concept of “Short Drama + Social Value”, the work embeds issues such as family communication dilemmas and female self-awakening into an episodic structure, avoiding unrealistic or detached narratives.

### **3.2. All-student creative team structure and communication mechanism**

The creative practice of the campus short drama *Against the Current* shows that student team management should take “professional division of labor + collaborative innovation” as the core logic. By means of a scientific structure and ability training mechanism, the contradiction between creative efficiency and artistic

quality can be resolved. Based on the conclusion that interpersonal communication and content creation are the core competencies for short drama talents, team management should be carried out around these two capability dimensions, while taking into account technical application and project management capabilities <sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3.2.1. Team structure and division of labor: Dual-track driven and matrix collaboration**

The team of *Against the Current* adopts a “dual-track system” structure. The director group serves as the vertical core to coordinate creation, while functional departments such as photography, screenwriting, and post-production are horizontally set for professional division of labor, realizing collaboration through flat communication.

## **3.3. Technology empowerment and low-cost production**

### **3.3.1. Horizontal-screen shooting: Balancing visual standards and narrative scenes**

Horizontal-screen shooting enhances immersion and emotional tension through a wide frame. *Against the Current* adopts a 17:9 aspect ratio to expand vision and depth, suitable for full-screen displays. In creation, the team coordinates lighting, scene, and composition: mixed lighting (natural light + LED) is used to avoid overexposure; composition highlights the subject, combined with symmetrical and depth scheduling. For technical adaptation, the team uses Sony FX6V with DJI equipment, and standardized parameters (such as  $ISO \leq 800$ , color temperature 5600K) improve efficiency, shortening the single-episode shooting cycle to 0.5 days.

### **3.3.2. AI technology empowerment: Upgrading production efficiency and artistic expression**

Technological breakthroughs have driven advanced artificial intelligence to be deeply integrated into short drama production. Multimodal AI technologies have covered the entire process, including scriptwriting, character design, scene construction, editing, and audio generation.

This development trend indicates that the application of artificial intelligence in short drama production is evolving from fragmented task processing to a full-process automated production model, covering the complete chain from pre-planning to post-production <sup>[5]</sup>.

## **3.4. Improvement of students' professional ability and humanistic literacy: Boosting the new form of “short drama + ideological and political education”**

The creation of the campus short drama *Against the Current* offers an experimental example for integrating campus short dramas with education.

The “Short Drama + Ideological and Political Education” model uses light narration to implicitly convey knowledge and values through plots. Set in campus life, *Against the Current* embeds ideological and political themes into character growth via a “problem chain” narrative, reflects educational issues through conflicts, struggles, and mutual support, and portrays psychological adjustment.

## **4. Analysis of existing problems in *Against the Current*: Practical difficulties at the creative level**

### **4.1. Limited technical level and creative ability gap in the all-student team**

(1) External gap: Insufficient experience in core positions (screenwriting, directing, post-production) has resulted in loose narration and monotonous audio-visual language. For instance, in *Against the Current*, character motivations are vague, and plots are stiff. The team lacks market and user thinking, relying

mainly on perceptual creation. In addition, non-professional actors have performance deficiencies, leading to inadequate character portrayal.

- (2) Internal gap: There is a huge difference in practical experience between senior and junior students. Juniors have weak practical skills (e.g., poor script logic and unfamiliar shot language), while seniors have limited time and energy due to graduation pressure. This results in inefficient teamwork, creative stagnation, and failure to meet the expected quality of the work.

## **4.2. Barriers to interdisciplinary professional collaboration**

The *Against the Current* team suffers from weak interdisciplinary cooperation, insufficient management and marketing support, ambiguous roles, and low communication efficiency. Members work in isolation: screenwriters prioritize literary quality over filming reality, while editors fail to fully convey the creative vision, resulting in a final work distant from the original idea. This reflects students' inadequate awareness of cross-disciplinary collaboration. The industry currently advocates cross-border models such as "content + cultural tourism" and "content + e-commerce", yet campus creation remains confined within a single-discipline closed loop, making it difficult to achieve synergistic resource effects <sup>[4]</sup>.

## **5. Optimization path design for campus short dramas: Breakthroughs at the creative level**

### **5.1. Constructing a ladder-type talent training mechanism**

To address the ability gap among students, a "laddered training system" will be established: junior students will consolidate basic skills, including scriptwriting, shot composition, and filming techniques, while senior students will enhance their creative and project management capabilities with practical guidance from industry mentors. A "senior-junior mutual assistance" model will be adopted to improve teamwork abilities.

### **5.2. Establish a "role-task" mapping mechanism**

Establishing a "role-task" mapping mechanism is key to resolving the creative issues of *Against the Current*. Universities can build interdisciplinary platforms through workshops and practices to boost teacher-student cross-major cooperation, improve communication efficiency, and support subsequent projects.

### **5.3. School resource support and assistance**

To address resource constraints in producing the campus short drama *Against the Current*, universities should establish a funding and equipment support system. Funding can come from corporate sponsorships and alumni donations, with simplified approval processes, greater financial autonomy for production teams, and priority allocation to key areas such as music copyright, costumes, makeup, and props. For equipment, universities should provide professional lenses, wireless focusing and multichannel audio devices, upgrade postproduction workstations and software, and offer technical training to enhance students' practical skills.

## **6. Conclusion**

*Against the Current* offers a model for the differentiated and education-oriented development of campus short dramas. Through its "fantasy setting + social issues" concept of a mother returning to youth, it reconstructs

intergenerational communication and reflects real problems while balancing emotion and campus culture.

Supported by a dual-track structure and AI technology, the student team realized high-quality, low-cost production and improved professional abilities. Despite limited promotion, its cross-media narrative and educational practice have paved a “small-scale, high-value” path. Its core value lies in three points: delivering value via the “short drama + education” model; building a replicable campus creation system; and breaking content homogeneity through fantasy realism.

Balancing cultural and market needs, the project stimulates youth creation and forms a policy–school–enterprise–technology ecosystem. It proves that campus short dramas must rely on in-depth content, technological integration, and educational orientation to achieve sustainable development amid commercialization.

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## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Author contributions

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