

Innovative Exploration of Academic Guidance for Undergraduate Students in Universities: Theory, Practice, and Development Path

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Abstract: Undergraduate academic guidance is a key link in the reform of the talent cultivation system in higher education. In recent years, under the guidance of national education policies, China's academic guidance has achieved phased results. At the theoretical level, breaking through the limitations of instrumental cognition and becoming an important link between national strategic needs and university education reform; At the practical level, a specialized and comprehensive management guidance model has been formed, with a coverage rate of 78% (Ministry of Education, 2021); At the methodological level, complete the paradigm shift from normative to developmental, highlighting students' subjectivity.

Keywords: Higher Education, Academic Guidance, Talent Training

1. Introduction

The academic guidance for undergraduate students in Chinese universities began in the 1990s and has undergone more than 30 years of development, from the embryonic stage of decentralized counseling (1990-2000), to the development stage of policy driven systematic construction (2001-2015), and then to the deepening stage of personalized and intelligent guidance (2016 present). According to the China Education Statistical Yearbook 2022, as of 2021, all 92 "Double First Class" universities in China have established academic guidance centers. After the popularization stage of higher education, the reform of the higher education system has also entered a new development stage of major adjustments, innovations, and changes. Academic guidance, as an important part of higher education, has ushered in significant development opportunities and has become an important support for exploring talent cultivation models in universities. This article starts with the theoretical cognition, practical methods, and promotion process of undergraduate academic guidance in universities, and explores the progress and gains and losses of academic guidance for college students in China, providing reference for higher quality and higher level undergraduate academic guidance in the future.

2. Theoretical cognition: the transformation from teaching assistance to educational system reform

Since 1999, the country has successively issued a series of documents such as the "Action Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century" and the "Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Fully Promoting Quality Education", proposing to comprehensively revitalize the education industry, achieve rapid growth in higher education, and push China's higher education into a period of great development. In 2015, the State Council issued the "Overall Plan for Coordinating the Construction of World Class Universities and Disciplines", which clearly proposed to "accelerate the modernization of the governance system and governance capacity of higher education, accelerate the reform of talent training mode, and promote the coordinated education of science and education". The reform of university governance has also been put on the agenda. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of higher education in China and the reform of university governance, what should college students learn? How to learn? Becoming a question that universities need to re-examine and answer in the process of talent cultivation [1]. In the process of reforming the education system and mechanism in universities, academic guidance for college students has also become a key carrier for universities to achieve personalized education and high-quality talent cultivation [2].

Academic Advice originated from the mentorship system in 19th century American universities, and in China, there are different localized translations for academic guidance, academic affairs guidance,

academic counseling, academic counseling, and academic guidance. Scholars and educational institutions at home and abroad have different focuses on defining academic guidance. Academic counseling refers to educational activities aimed at improving the quality of students' learning and promoting their academic development, through organizing relevant forces both inside and outside the school to provide counseling and assistance to students. "According to" Research on Academic Counseling for College Students, "in a broad sense, academic counseling courses include all behaviors that promote students' academic development, including learning, career, psychology, and other aspects; From a narrow perspective, academic guidance mainly refers to specialized assistance and guidance provided in areas directly related to students' academic planning, goals, development, and support. It is an effective way to promote students' academic performance and improve the quality of talent cultivation in universities [3]. Tsinghua University believes that academic guidance is based on the teaching objectives of higher education and the common needs of students' academic development. Educational institutions establish corresponding organizational systems, systematically integrate and optimize various educational resources that are conducive to students' academic development both inside and outside of class, rely on relevant theories and research methods in the fields of education, sociology, psychology, etc., comprehensively apply various guidance methods and means, provide professional guidance and support for students' academic development, and ultimately achieve the goal of students' growth and success in higher education[4].

Compared to the "developmental guidance" model proposed by NACADA in the United States, China emphasizes the collaborative mechanism under the concept of "three pronged education". In 2017, the "Implementation Outline of the Quality Improvement Project for Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities" included academic guidance for the first time in the "Ten Major Education Systems". Many universities are trying to provide academic guidance tailored to the individual characteristics of college students, helping them complete their university studies smoothly and with high quality. By applying traditional theories of psychology and learning science, combined with the constructivist paradigm, emphasizing the design of student learning environments, a comprehensive interdisciplinary theoretical school called the Learning Science School is formed to intervene in student learning, guide students to independently construct knowledge, and promote their independent development. However, the teaching assisted academic guidance represented by the learning science school has failed to meet the diverse learning needs of students, and the intrinsic motivation for students' independent growth has not been well stimulated.

Academic guidance is a transformative event that cannot be ignored in the process of reforming the education system and mechanism in Chinese universities. After entering the 21st century, academic guidance has gradually evolved from a teacher's job responsibility to a new specialized field in higher education. Its counseling content has expanded from guidance on classroom knowledge transmission to comprehensive counseling on students' academic career, academic planning, learning motivation, learning ability, and learning methods. After China's higher education entered the stage of mass development, with the expansion of enrollment scale, the flexible credit system was implemented in the field of higher education, breaking the traditional employment distribution system. At the same time, the internal reform of higher education and the driving force of socio-economic development have promoted a series of changes in talent cultivation in universities [5]. In 2005, the Ministry of Education issued the "Regulations on the Management of Students in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions", which clearly stated that "students can apply to transfer majors according to the regulations of the school. The transfer of majors by students is approved by the school, and the school may adjust the majors studied by students appropriately with the consent of students based on the development and changes in the demand for talents in society [6].

Subsequently, universities across the country have issued or revised opinions and methods for students to transfer majors, providing strong institutional guarantees for students to make their second major choices. How undergraduate students choose a satisfactory and suitable major is not only related to their personal growth and development, but also to the results and quality of cultivating innovative talents in the whole society. Universities provide practical and effective support for students' scientific development through academic guidance, thereby promoting the overall quality improvement of higher education talent cultivation and adapting to the education reform direction of national talent cultivation needs.

3. Practical approach: transition from decentralized to comprehensive management based academic guidance

With the continuous deepening of the reform and structural adjustment of China's higher education system, universities have carried out effective explorations and practices in paying attention to students' career development, employment guidance, students' mental health and personality soundness. The practical form of academic guidance has also undergone profound changes in this process, gradually moving from scattered and fragmented guidance in the early days to a systematic and professional comprehensive management guidance model. In the stage of decentralized academic guidance, the academic guidance work in universities often presents fragmented characteristics. For example, some universities only have counselors conduct simple academic conversations after students fail exams; Alternatively, teachers may occasionally provide guidance on students' learning methods in addition to course instruction. This model lacks systematic planning and collaboration among guiding subjects, making it difficult to meet the diverse and personalized academic development needs of students. Its drawbacks are particularly prominent when students face complex academic problems, such as interdisciplinary learning planning and introductory guidance for scientific research. Decentralized guidance is difficult to provide comprehensive and in-depth support.

The rise of the comprehensive management based academic guidance model is an inevitable requirement for the connotative development of higher education. In 2014, the Ministry of Education issued the "Provisional Standards for Professional Competence of College Counselors", which proposed academic guidance as a professional competence and formulated corresponding standards, providing policy basis for the professionalization and specialization of academic guidance. The guidance of policies has prompted universities to pay attention to the construction of academic guidance systems. Since 2009, Tsinghua University, Peking University, Fudan University, Dalian University of Technology and other universities have successively established academic guidance institutions. For example, Tsinghua University has established a Learning and Development Guidance Center, which has built a three in one academic guidance system of "curriculum consultation activity", covering various aspects such as learning strategy guidance, academic planning consultation, and subject competition training; The Academic Development Support Center of Peking University provides personalized learning diagnosis and counseling services for students through a combination of online and offline methods. These institutions integrate internal and external resources, develop standardized guidance processes, and promote the transformation of academic guidance from scattered auxiliary work to specialized and standardized educational practices. As is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparative analysis of typical cases

| Colleges and universities | Mode features | Performance data |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Tsinghua University | The trinity of "course consultation activity" | Student satisfaction increased by 32% (2019-2022) |
| Zhejiang University | Digitize academic warning system | The conversion rate of students with academic difficulties has reached 85% |
| Local teachers colleges | Peer mentorship system | The average investment in guidance resources per student is only 1/5 of that of "Double First Class" universities |

However, the exploration of systematizing academic guidance in Chinese universities is still in its early stages. At the theoretical level, there is still insufficient research on academic guidance in China, and there is a lack of in-depth and systematic exploration of core issues such as guidance models and effectiveness evaluation, making it difficult to form effective guidance for practice; At the practical level, although some universities have made beneficial attempts, the overall coverage is limited, and many institutions are still in the exploratory stage and have not yet formed mature operational mechanisms. In addition, issues such as uneven professionalization of the guidance team, uneven allocation of resources, and deviations between guidance content and students' actual needs remain prominent. Building a specialized, refined, specialized, and institutionalized academic guidance system for universities still requires in-depth exploration in theoretical research, practical innovation, resource integration, and other aspects. This is not only the key to improving the quality of higher education, but also an inevitable requirement for promoting students' comprehensive development.

4. Advancement process: transition from normative approach to developmental approach

In the evolution of academic guidance for undergraduate students in Chinese universities, the innovation of guidance methods deeply reflects the iterative upgrading of educational concepts. The shift from a normative approach based on rule constraints and course guidance to a developmental approach

centered on student development and emphasizing personalized guidance not only meets the needs of higher education's connotative development, but also reflects the emphasis on student subjectivity. The coordinated development of peer guidance system, mentorship system, and professional guidance has become a key driving force for this transformation.

The standardized process (such as Article 21 of the Regulations on the Management of Students in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions) emphasizes regulating and guiding students' learning behavior through curriculum systems, academic management systems, and other means. In the traditional mode, universities often instill basic information such as credit requirements, examination systems, and training programs to students through compulsory courses such as "Freshman Enrollment Education" and "Academic Planning Courses"; At the same time, establish an academic warning mechanism and implement intervention measures such as centralized talks and mandatory make-up classes for students who fail to meet academic standards. This approach has played an important role in ensuring basic teaching order and conveying basic academic information, but it overemphasizes common requirements and ignores individual differences of students, making it difficult to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation for active learning. When facing complex academic problems, the guidance effect is limited, only covering 12% of personalized needs.

Developmental academic guidance is based on humanistic education theory, advocating respect for individual differences among students, emphasizing the exploration of students' potential, and helping them achieve comprehensive development. Colleges and universities deeply integrate academic guidance with career planning, innovation ability cultivation, and mental health education by building a diversified guidance system. The "1+X" mentorship system at Tsinghua University optimizes the student teacher ratio to 5:1 to ensure effective guidance on students' academic issues; Fudan University's "Academic Portrait" system is based on AI based demand matching, with an accuracy rate of 89% in meeting students' academic needs.

Peer guidance, as an important carrier of developmental academic guidance, has demonstrated unique advantages in the practice of Chinese universities. Its theoretical roots can be traced back to Rogers' humanistic theory, which emphasizes the construction of guidance relationships based on equality and empathy, reducing the authoritative barriers in traditional teacher-student guidance. At the practical level, Chinese universities have formed a diversified peer guidance model: the "graduate assistant" system selects outstanding graduate students with outstanding academic performance and research abilities to serve as course assistants, assisting teachers in conducting experimental guidance, homework grading, and Q&A tutoring. Taking Zhejiang University as an example, graduate teaching assistants participate in the teaching of basic subject courses, providing specialized guidance for students' common problems in knowledge understanding and experimental operations, effectively alleviating the contradiction of insufficient teacher-student ratio. The "mentorship system" selects outstanding undergraduate students from higher grades to serve as freshmen mentors. Through experience sharing, group discussions, one-on-one assistance, and other forms, it helps freshmen adapt to university life and professional learning. In the "Friends of Freshmen" program at Fudan University, guided students not only teach learning methods, but also share experiences in club activities, scientific research competitions, and other activities to help freshmen quickly integrate into campus culture. Students spontaneously form a learning community and engage in collaborative learning around curriculum difficulties, research projects, etc. The "Peer Academic Workshop" at Beijing Normal University is independently planned and organized by students, focusing on cutting-edge disciplinary issues for discussion, forming a virtuous learning ecology of peer assistance and mutual improvement.

The implementation of the mentorship system has further deepened the practical connotation of developmental academic guidance. Chinese universities provide personalized guidance to students through the implementation of diverse mentorship systems such as academic mentors, research mentors, and career mentors. Tsinghua University's "1+X" academic mentorship system, consisting of a professional teacher, counselors, senior students, and other guidance teams, provides students with full chain support from course selection, academic research, to career planning; The "teacher-student academic community" model of Nankai University encourages mentors and students to participate in research projects together, cultivating students' academic thinking and innovation abilities in practice. These practices have shown that the mentorship system can accurately meet the needs of students by building close teacher-student interaction relationships, and play a key role in academic improvement, scientific research enlightenment, value shaping, and other aspects.

The transformation from standardized to developmental academic guidance methods is essentially a value return of education from "management oriented" to "student-centered". The innovative practice of peer guidance and mentorship breaks the limitations of traditional guidance models, providing an

effective path for improving the effectiveness of academic guidance and promoting students' comprehensive development. However, in practice, further improvement of institutional design and optimization of resource allocation are still needed to fully unleash the educational effectiveness of developmental guidance.

5. Conclusion

After more than 30 years of exploration and development, academic guidance for undergraduate students in Chinese universities has initially formed a theoretical cognitive framework and practical model with Chinese characteristics. From a theoretical perspective, academic guidance has evolved from a simple teaching aid to an important component of higher education system and mechanism reform, with its connotation and extension constantly expanding; From a practical perspective, the guidance model has achieved a leapfrog development from decentralized to comprehensive management, with a significant increase in specialization and systematization; From a methodological perspective, the transition from normative guidance to developmental guidance has been completed, with a greater emphasis on student subjectivity and comprehensive development. These changes are not only a positive response to the development trend of international higher education, but also an inherent requirement for the connotative development of higher education in China.

However, the current construction of the academic guidance system still faces many challenges. This article mainly covers "Double First Class" universities, lacking long-term tracking data and insufficient theoretical research depth, making it difficult to effectively guide practical innovation; Uneven resource allocation and significant inter school differences; The professionalization level of the guidance team needs to be improved; Insufficient digital empowerment and limited application of intelligent guidance methods. In future development, it is necessary to focus on breaking through the following key links: firstly, strengthening theoretical research, improving institutional design, and constructing an evaluation system of "academic guidance quality index"; The second is to promote digital transformation, explore new models of intelligent chemical industry guidance, and explore immersive guidance scenarios empowered by metaverse technology; The third is to strengthen team building, promote the organic integration of academic guidance and talent cultivation system, and enhance the professional level of guidance personnel.

In the context of building a high-quality education system in the new era, academic guidance in universities should actively adapt to the new requirements of higher education reform and development, with promoting students' comprehensive development as the core, constantly innovating guidance concepts and methods, and providing strong support for cultivating high-quality talents with both morality and talent. This is not only the only way to improve the quality of higher education, but also an important guarantee for achieving educational modernization.

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