

A Study on the Guiding Role of Counselors in College Students' Career Planning Education

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Abstract: As higher education in China shifts from extensive expansion to connotative development, career planning education for college students has gained increasing importance within the overall talent cultivation system. In the context of a rapidly changing employment landscape and the growing diversity of students' individual development needs, reliance on a single, traditional employment guidance model is no longer sufficient to meet practical demands. As the backbone of ideological and political education and daily student management in universities, counselors possess unique and irreplaceable advantages in guiding students' career planning. On the basis of a review of relevant theories of career planning for college students and an analysis of counselors' role positioning, this study examines the current situation of counselors' participation in career planning education in higher education institutions. It systematically elaborates on the positive roles counselors play in value guidance, career cognition facilitation, and personalized development support. At the same time, in response to existing challenges—such as insufficient professional expertise, heavy work pressure, and imperfect coordination mechanisms—this paper proposes corresponding improvement strategies, including enhancing counselors' professional competence, strengthening support systems, and improving collaborative education mechanisms. The study concludes that giving full play to the guiding role of counselors in college students' career planning education is of significant practical value for promoting the effective alignment between students' self-awareness and social demands, as well as for improving the overall quality of talent cultivation in higher education.

Keywords: Counselors; college students; career planning education; employment guidance; educational function

1. Introduction

With the continuous deepening of higher education reform and the ongoing optimization of talent cultivation objectives in universities, career planning education for college students has gradually become an integral component of the higher education system. Influenced by factors such as economic structural adjustment, industrial upgrading, and changes in social demand, the current employment situation has become increasingly complex, leading to greater uncertainty in students' career choices and development paths. Many students experience confusion in terms of professional understanding, career positioning, and pathway selection, often manifested in vague career goals and a mismatch between employment expectations and reality. These issues not only affect individual students' growth and development but also pose higher demands on the quality of talent cultivation and the effectiveness of employment outcomes in universities. Therefore, systematically advancing career planning education and guiding students to develop a scientific understanding of themselves and a rational perception of society have become pressing issues for higher education institutions. As the main force in ideological and political education and student affairs management, counselors maintain long-term, close, and stable contact with students, playing a critical role in value guidance, developmental mentoring, and the regulation of daily behavior. Compared with specialized employment guidance courses or stage-based employment services, counselors demonstrate greater continuity and holistic advantages in career planning education, as they are able to integrate career development guidance throughout students' entire university experience. However, in actual practice, the functional positioning, implementation pathways, and effectiveness of counselors' involvement in career planning education still require further clarification and in-depth exploration. Against this background, this paper focuses on the guiding role of counselors in college students' career planning education. By analyzing relevant theoretical foundations and practical experiences, it explores the unique strengths of counselors in value orientation, career cognition guidance, and personalized developmental support. In

addition, targeted improvement strategies are proposed to address existing problems, with the aim of providing useful references for universities to improve their career planning education systems and enhance the overall effectiveness of student development and education.

2. Definition of Key Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

2.1. *Connotations and Characteristics of Career Planning for College Students*

Career planning refers to the process in which individuals, based on a comprehensive understanding of their interests, abilities, values, and external environmental conditions, systematically reflect on and rationally arrange their future career development goals, implementation pathways, and stage-specific tasks. In essence, career planning is not merely a single act of job selection; rather, it is a long-term and dynamic management activity that runs through an individual's learning, personal growth, and career development. Its main components generally include self-awareness, analysis of the occupational environment, career goal setting, development pathway design, as well as implementation and adjustment, emphasizing the coordination and alignment between individual development and social needs. During the university stage, career planning exhibits distinct developmental characteristics. On the one hand, college students are at a critical transitional period from being "students" to becoming "members of society," during which their values, career outlook, and life perspectives have not yet fully stabilized, and their career cognition remains exploratory and uncertain[1]. On the other hand, the university period is also a crucial stage for accumulating professional knowledge, enhancing comprehensive abilities, and forming an initial sense of career direction. Therefore, career planning for college students places greater emphasis on guidance and developmental orientation, focusing on helping students gradually identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop a rational understanding of the intrinsic relationship between academic learning and future careers, rather than prematurely fixing specific job choices[2]. From the perspective of educational practice, career planning for college students is closely related to, yet clearly distinct from, traditional employment guidance. Employment guidance tends to focus more on job-search skills, policy interpretation, and job matching during the graduation stage, and thus has strong stage-specific and practical characteristics. In contrast, career planning spans the entire process of university education, emphasizing a long-term developmental perspective and systematic cultivation of students' competency structures, professional qualities, and development potential. Although both share common objectives—serving students' successful employment and sustainable development—they differ in terms of depth of content and implementation cycles[3]. At the same time, career planning education for college students is intrinsically aligned with the talent cultivation objectives of higher education institutions. Talent cultivation in universities not only emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also places importance on the development of comprehensive qualities, innovative capacity, and social adaptability. Through well-designed career planning education, students can be guided to integrate their personal development goals with national development needs, social job structures, and industry trends, thereby enhancing the relevance and forward-looking nature of talent cultivation and promoting positive interaction between individual growth and social development[4].

2.2. *Role Positioning and Educational Functions of Counselors*

From a policy perspective, counselors constitute a key force in the implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education in Chinese higher education institutions. Relevant policy documents clearly define counselors as the backbone of ideological and political education for college students, as well as organizers, implementers, and guides of students' daily education, management, and growth development. Their responsibilities cover multiple dimensions, including value guidance, academic development, psychological support, and employment guidance. This role positioning determines that counselors are not merely administrative staff handling routine affairs, but comprehensive educators who integrate value shaping, capacity building, and developmental support, playing a continuous and stable guiding role throughout students' growth processes[5]. In practical university settings, the value-guiding function of counselors is mainly reflected in their education and guidance concerning students' worldviews, outlooks on life, and value systems. Through activities such as themed class meetings, individual counseling sessions, and practical programs, counselors guide students to correctly understand the relationship between personal ideals and social needs, as well as between short-term choices and long-term development, thereby laying an ideological foundation for the formation of sound career values. Such value-oriented

guidance is of foundational significance for career planning among college students and helps them maintain rational judgment and emotional stability when facing diverse career options. In terms of developmental guidance, counselors rely on their long-term understanding of students' academic performance, behavioral patterns, and psychological conditions to provide continuous and personalized guidance from a holistic developmental perspective. Counselors are concerned not only with students' academic completion, but also with the cultivation of their comprehensive qualities, competency structures, and development potential[6]. By guiding students to form positive interactions among professional learning, social practice, and ability enhancement, counselors offer growth-oriented support that is closely aligned with students' real situations and spans the entire university experience. This type of guidance provides realistic foundations and dynamic support for career planning. At the level of employment services, counselors usually undertake responsibilities such as disseminating employment policies, transmitting job-related information, and guiding students' employment concepts, while also providing job-search guidance and psychological support during the graduation stage. Although counselors are not full-time employment specialists, their role in employment services demonstrates clear bridging and complementary advantages. By integrating employment guidance with daily ideological education and developmental mentoring, counselors help students examine short-term employment choices within a long-term career development framework. In summary, both policy requirements and higher education practices indicate that counselors undertake systematic and multifaceted educational responsibilities in value guidance, developmental mentoring, and employment services. This comprehensive role positioning endows counselors with a natural foundation and unique advantages for participation in career planning education for college students, and also provides a solid theoretical basis for further analysis of their guiding role in career planning education in subsequent sections[7].

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of Counselors' Participation in Career Planning Education for College Students

3.1. Main Approaches Adopted by Counselors in Career Planning Guidance

In the practice of career planning education in higher education institutions, counselors typically participate through multiple channels and gradually form a guidance model that relies on daily educational work and is promoted through diverse, coordinated approaches. Among these, integrating career planning content into course teaching is one of the primary means of counselor involvement. In some universities, counselors undertake partial teaching or auxiliary teaching responsibilities in freshman orientation programs, ideological and political theory courses, or career development-related courses. By systematically explaining fundamental concepts of career planning, development pathways, and practical requirements, counselors guide students to establish an initial awareness of career development. This form of curricular integration contributes to comprehensive coverage of career planning education and helps students develop a rational understanding of career development at an early stage. Individual counseling represents the most targeted approach through which counselors conduct career planning guidance. Relying on established counseling and communication mechanisms, counselors engage in face-to-face, in-depth discussions with students, providing specific advice on issues such as major selection, academic development, career direction, and personal concerns. Because counselors maintain long-term contact with students and possess a relatively comprehensive understanding of their academic performance, personality traits, and developmental needs, they are better positioned to offer personalized guidance in career planning consultations[8]. This one-on-one mode of interaction helps students clarify self-awareness and alleviates anxiety and confusion during the career decision-making process. Thematic activities also serve as important platforms for counselors' involvement in career planning education. By organizing career planning lectures, alumni experience-sharing sessions, industry awareness forums, and career assessment and planning workshops, counselors create opportunities for students to gain insight into the professional world and societal demands. Such activities are characterized by broad participation and strong interactivity, which can stimulate students' interest in career development at a collective level and enhance their initiative in career planning. At the same time, counselors play dual roles in organization and value guidance during the planning and implementation of these activities, ensuring that the content is closely aligned with students' actual needs. In terms of practical guidance, counselors commonly encourage and guide students to participate in social practice, volunteer service, internships, training programs, and innovation and entrepreneurship activities, enabling them to experience occupational roles and work requirements in real-world contexts. Practical activities not only help students test their career interests and abilities, but also provide a realistic basis for adjusting their career plans[9]. Through

process tracking and reflective guidance, counselors help students transform practical experiences into rational understanding of their own developmental directions, thereby facilitating the transition of career planning from “cognition” to “action.” Overall, through multiple approaches—including curricular integration, individual counseling, thematic activities, and practical guidance—counselors have constructed a relatively multidimensional pathway for career planning guidance. These approaches complement and reinforce one another, providing practical support for the sustained advancement of career planning education for college students[10].

3.2. Existing Problems and Analysis of Their Causes

Despite their positive role in career planning education, counselors face multiple challenges in practice. A key issue is insufficient professional competence. Some counselors lack systematic training in career planning theory and limited experience with professional tools, resulting in an overreliance on personal experience rather than evidence-based guidance. This makes it difficult to respond effectively to students’ increasingly diverse and individualized career development needs, reflecting inadequate emphasis on career guidance competence within existing training systems. Limited time and energy further constrain counselors’ effectiveness. In addition to career guidance, counselors are responsible for ideological education, student affairs management, campus safety, and evaluation tasks. The heavy and administrative nature of this workload reduces career planning guidance to a fragmented or reactive activity, weakening its depth and continuity—particularly in institutions with large student populations and insufficient staffing. Institutional support also remains inadequate in some universities. Counselors’ roles in career planning are not fully integrated into broader talent cultivation and employment systems, with unclear responsibilities and weak evaluation and incentive mechanisms. As a result, counselors often lack stable policy guarantees and resource support, and their contributions are difficult to assess and recognize, reducing motivation and sustainability. Moreover, imperfect coordination mechanisms limit overall effectiveness. Insufficient collaboration and resource sharing among counselors, academic faculty, career services departments, and external employers lead to fragmented implementation and weak alignment between career guidance, academic training, and employment services. This is closely linked to rigid organizational structures and the absence of mature cross-departmental collaboration frameworks. Overall, these challenges arise from both individual-level capacity constraints and deeper structural issues within university management systems, providing a realistic basis for exploring strategies to strengthen counselors’ guiding role in career planning education.

4. The Guiding Role of Counselors in Career Planning Education for College Students

4.1. Value Guidance and the Shaping of Career Outlooks

In career planning education for college students, counselors play a fundamental role in value guidance, exerting a lasting influence on students’ views of career choice, employment, and life development. The university stage is a critical period for the formation of worldviews and value systems. Faced with diverse social values and a complex labor market, some students are prone to utilitarian or short-term orientations that may distort their understanding of career choices. Through sustained ideological education and daily guidance, counselors help students develop a rational understanding of the relationship between individual development and social needs, thereby establishing a stable value framework for career decision-making. In guiding career choice, counselors integrate national development strategies, industrial transformation, and real social demands to encourage students to adopt rational and pragmatic criteria, rather than focusing solely on salary, location, or social status. By analyzing typical cases and real-world issues, counselors help students recognize the social value of different occupations and make choices that align personal interests and abilities with societal needs. In shaping employment outlooks, counselors emphasize long-term development and process-oriented growth, guiding students to view setbacks and adjustments as integral parts of career development. Through counseling and psychological support, counselors reduce employment anxiety and foster a positive, open, and sustainable employment mindset, helping students understand that employment marks the beginning rather than the end of career development. At the level of life development outlook, counselors guide students to integrate personal aspirations with social progress and contemporary demands, cultivating sound life goals and a sense of responsibility. By highlighting the connections between career choice, personal value realization, and social contribution, counselors support students in forming stable and long-term development plans. Overall,

through value guidance and sustained engagement, counselors provide an irreplaceable foundation for rational and sustainable career planning among college students.

4.2. Personalized Guidance and the Role of Continuous Accompaniment

In career planning education for college students, counselors hold distinct advantages due to their long-term involvement in students' growth and their deep understanding of individual differences. Through daily management, counseling interactions, and activity organization, counselors gain a comprehensive view of students' academic performance, behavioral patterns, psychological states, and interests, enabling them to identify students' actual needs and provide more targeted career guidance. In career cognition guidance, counselors integrate students' academic backgrounds and performance to help them assess their interests and abilities in a rational manner. They offer step-by-step guidance to students with unclear career goals, while assisting those with clearer intentions in refining their plans through objective analysis of real conditions and potential challenges. Such individualized guidance helps reduce blind or impulsive career decisions. Regarding ability development, counselors encourage participation in research, social practice, student activities, and internships, helping students identify skill gaps and improve through practical experience. Continuous follow-up and feedback further support systematic and sustained competence development. Throughout the selection and adjustment of career paths, counselors' continuous accompaniment plays a crucial role. By providing timely support at key stages, counselors help students navigate uncertainty and change with clarity and confidence, fostering a dynamic approach to career planning. Overall, through personalized guidance and sustained support, counselors contribute significantly to students' scientific and sustainable career development.

5. Pathways and Strategies for Strengthening Counselors' Guiding Role in Career Planning

5.1. Enhancing Counselors' Professional Competence in Career Guidance

Enhancing counselors' professional competence is a fundamental prerequisite for strengthening their role in career planning guidance. Higher education institutions should incorporate career guidance skills into counselor training and professional development, and establish systematic, multi-level training programs. Regular training on career development theories, counseling methods, employment trends, and policy interpretation can help counselors update their knowledge and improve professional literacy, while tiered training models can better address differences in experience and practical needs. Universities may also develop evaluation and certification mechanisms for career guidance competence, linking professional development with performance appraisal and career advancement. Encouraging counselors to obtain relevant certifications or participate in specialized training programs can deepen their understanding of career guidance in both theory and practice, while enhancing professional recognition at an institutional level. Adequate resource support further ensures the effectiveness of professional development. By providing access to industry data, assessment tools, employment platforms, and case resources, and by promoting learning communities or professional exchange platforms, universities can facilitate resource sharing and improve overall guidance quality. The coordinated advancement of training, certification, and resource support provides a solid foundation for more precise and effective career planning guidance.

5.2. Building a Collaborative Mechanism for Advancing Career Planning Education

Establishing a collaborative mechanism is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of counselors' career guidance. Given the systematic and comprehensive nature of career planning education, reliance on counselors alone is insufficient to address students' diverse developmental needs. Multi-party collaboration is therefore required, with counselors acting as coordinators who connect students' individual needs with internal university resources and external social support, thereby promoting a shift from fragmented practices to a more integrated approach. Within universities, closer cooperation between counselors and academic faculty is necessary. Faculty members contribute expertise in disciplinary development and industry trends, while counselors possess a deeper understanding of students' individual circumstances. Through regular communication and the integration of academic learning with career development guidance, students can better align their studies with future career goals. Collaboration with career services departments should also be strengthened through mechanisms for information sharing and coordinated action. By jointly organizing career guidance activities, lectures, and individual counseling, employment-related resources can be effectively integrated into

career planning education, helping students link long-term aspirations with immediate employment decisions. In addition, external social resources, including employers, alumni, and industry professionals, should be actively engaged. Through enterprise visits, internships, alumni exchanges, and career experience programs, counselors can provide students with authentic insights into the world of work, while guiding them to rationally interpret and apply this information in their own career planning. Overall, a collaborative mechanism involving counselors, faculty, career services, and social partners can enhance the coherence and continuity of career planning education, strengthen counselors' guiding role, and improve its practical effectiveness for college students.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically examines the guiding role of counselors in career planning education for college students. Building on relevant theoretical foundations and higher education practice, it analyzes counselors' functional value, practical approaches, and existing challenges in this field. The findings confirm that, due to their unique position in ideological and educational work and their sustained engagement with students, counselors play an irreplaceable role in career planning education, serving both as key guides in shaping career values and as continuous supporters of students' developmental processes. Through value guidance and career outlook shaping, counselors help students form rational and pragmatic perspectives on career choice and long-term development, while their personalized guidance and ongoing accompaniment enable targeted support in career cognition and capacity building. However, counselors continue to face challenges such as limited professional expertise, heavy workload pressures, insufficient institutional support, and weak coordination mechanisms. To address these issues, this study proposes strategies centered on enhancing professional competence and strengthening collaborative mechanisms, emphasizing the improvement of training systems, resource support, and multi-stakeholder cooperation. Future research should further refine counseling models by considering institutional and student diversity, and incorporate empirical methods to evaluate the effectiveness of counselors' guidance. The integration of theoretical inquiry and practical innovation will contribute to improving the scientific rigor and practical impact of career planning education for college students.

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