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INSPIRATION OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORIES TO THE STUDENT AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

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Abstract

Student affairs administration is a crucial component of educational administration, encompassing not only management and service functions but also educational roles. By optimizing the management model of student affairs in colleges and universities and providing students with high-quality education guidance and services, it will contribute to the development of vocational skills and the cultivation of well-rounded personalities among students in higher vocational colleges in the new era, thereby promoting their personal growth. Drawing from relevant literature at home and abroad, this paper organizes and summarizes key concepts and contents related to student affairs administration, introduces main theoretical viewpoints, and proposes strategies for optimizing management based on student development theories. This will be beneficial for referencing and applying student affairs administration in higher vocational colleges.

Keywords: Student Development Theories, Student Affairs Administration, Higher Vocational Colleges

Introduction

The student affairs administration is a crucial aspect of higher education institutions, and its smooth operation has a positive impact on the quality of nurturing talent (*Tong W.SH, 2017*). The 2023 National Education Work Conference in China has set specific requirements for promoting moral education and supporting the overall development of students following the successful 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. In China, student affairs administration is an essential part of school administration, not only serving students but also guiding and regulating their lives and studies (*Wen, B., 2013; Li, J. D., 2018*). Efforts in student management focused on high-quality and comprehensive development are important indicators for evaluating the level of higher education development and key aspects in building world-class universities (*Sun, X, Y., 2021*). With technological advancements, there have been significant changes in how college students study, live, interact, and entertain themselves. The demands from students for education, facilities, personalized programs, and services at higher education institutions have continued to increase and become more complex (*Long, D., 2012a; McClellan, G.S. & Stringer, J., 2016*). The upcoming changes will play a crucial role in shaping the future of student affairs. It is essential for student affairs work to respond positively and actively to the reforms and demands of society and higher education (*Long, D., 2012a*). As a result, the connotation of student management work and its functional dimensions have an inevitable impact on the personality formation of students in vocational colleges. Therefore, improving the student affairs administration system and providing high-quality educational guidance and services are beneficial for students' personal development, promoting their growth and success. This paper summarizes Student Development Theories' characteristics, briefly presents foreign regions' current status of student affairs administration models, methods, contents, and systems under their influence. Several viewpoints are proposed based on Shantou Vocational and Technical College's relevant work status with hopes that they will be adopted in the subsequent stage of student affairs administration work.

Student affairs administration

Currently, there is no consensus on how to define the concept of student affairs administration in Chinese higher education institutions. In China, "student affairs" is commonly referred to as "student work" (Chang, Y., 2022). Zhou, Q. & Shi, Y. Y. (2020) argue that student affairs administration in Chinese higher education institutions has distinct localized development characteristics; Sun, X. L., Shen, Y.H. & Jiang, L.L. (2019) argue that student affairs administration in colleges and universities is a concept that changes over time in response to shifts in social thought, advancements in science and technology, and changes in the attitudes of students. Chu, Z.W. & Jiang H.CH. (2009) believe that student affairs at colleges and universities refer to the support services provided outside of teaching activities to help students learn effectively, maintain order within the community, promote the overall development of students' qualities, and achieve educational goals. These can be divided into two aspects: managing student affairs and guiding and serving student affairs.

Student affairs administration in foreign higher education institutions shares similarities with China but also has some differences (Zhang, L.Y., 2022). In North America, for example, the focus of student affairs administration at colleges and universities is on nurturing talent with a core emphasis on students (Zhao, J., 2017). The primary role of those working in student affairs is to serve students (McClellan, G.S. & Stringer, J., 2016). Student affairs have evolved from "in loco parentis" to "student personnel", then to "student services", further evolving into "student development", before finally reaching "student learning" (Cai, G. CH., 2000; Chu, Z.W. & Jiang H.CH., 2009; Wu, H., 2012; McClellan, G.S. & Stringer, J., 2016). Just like Long (2012a) pointed out, the role of student affairs in higher education is varied, and its impact encompasses campus life, personality development, learning progress, and career growth. The provision of services focused on education is at the core of the work of student affairs administration practitioners.

In summary, by integrating domestic and international research, student affairs administration in colleges and universities refers to the process where departments, organizations, specialized managers' aim at talent cultivation in accordance with national laws and policies. Based on relevant concepts to meet students' development needs and conform to talent cultivation laws, it integrates education.

Student development theories

The traditional educational model focuses on educators, as mentioned by Xu, H. (2017), "students are placed in a passive and subordinate position during the process of education, and their interests and potential are not given enough attention, leading to insufficient discovery and development of their individuality." Currently, in North America and other regions, student affairs work is mainly based on the theory of student development. This theory integrates practical research advances in disciplines such as sociology and psychology, expanding the scope of student development beyond academic performance to be included in student affairs administration. This promotes the holistic development of students from multiple dimensions (Abiddin, N. Z. & Ismail, A., 2012; Long, D., 2012b). Abiddin, N. Z. & Ismail, A. (2012) suggest that the theory of student development is a useful strategy, while Long (2012b) believes that it lays the foundation for student affairs work and advances most daily tasks. The theory of student development is currently viewed from four main perspectives: social psychology, cognitive structure theory, humanistic theory, and "human-environment interaction" theory. These perspectives focus on the social psychology of student groups, students' thinking patterns, research and care for minority groups, and the role of the college environment in student development.

In summary, the theory of student development applies the laws of human development to the university environment and provides a different perspective for understanding college students' growth and development (Abiddin, N. Z. & Ismail, A., 2012; Long, D., 2012b). Learning from foreign concepts in student affairs administration can help broaden vocational college student management work and promote higher quality personal development for students.

Student affairs administration with student development theories

Working Concept

Student affairs administration starts from the needs of students and takes them as the center (Tang, H.T., 2017). In Japanese universities, the focus of educational activities is on students, who are not simply seen as the managed party. The fundamental driving force is to provide services for students (Ji, P.P., 2021). At NUS University and NTU University in Singapore, student affairs workers and their organizational structures mainly serve as representatives of students and coordinate the value claims of various stakeholders to stimulate joint participation in student governance and service. Serving the "holistic development" of students is the core goal of student affairs work in both universities (Sun, X, Y., 2021).

Organization and Operation Mode

Student affairs in higher education are typically organized as flat organizations with independent management departments (McClellan, G.S. & Stringer, J., 2016; Tang, H.T., 2017). In Japan, each university has a student affairs department that directly provides services to students and is highly professional (Ji, P.P., 2021). NUS University and NTU University have school-level student affairs offices managed by the head of instruction, with sub-departments providing face-to-face services based on their division of labor (Sun, X, Y., 2021).

Service Provision Mode

Japanese university student affairs administration includes student life, academic, and employment management, with a focus on consulting services to solve immediate problems for students (Ji, P.P., 2021). NUS University and NTU University emphasize the concept and mechanism of holistic development and education, prioritize the establishment of a campus culture that promotes rule of law, inclusivity, and humanity, and offer comprehensive life services. They also place importance on building a scientific advisory system to provide both online and offline resources and support, as well as collaborating with government, businesses, and social organizations to deliver professional employment services. Additionally, they focus on developing student associations and leadership skills while guiding students' growth (Sun, X, Y., 2021).

The academic administration departments of foreign universities demonstrate a comprehensive educational approach beyond traditional curriculum instruction in their management and support services. They focus on guiding students' professional interests, psychological abilities, and career paths, emphasizing the importance of self-development over simply providing knowledge.

Staff Composition

The field of student affairs administration in foreign universities has developed into a specialized career path (McClellan, G.S. & Stringer, J., 2016). In North America, the personnel structure of student affairs administration is diverse, consisting mainly of full-time teams with relevant educational and professional backgrounds. A significant portion of employees have backgrounds in sociology and psychology (Tang, H.T., 2017). In Japanese universities, full-

time staff in student affairs administration are required to hold at least a bachelor's degree, and each university provides comprehensive training and further education opportunities for these staff members to ensure efficient student affairs administration (Ji, P.P., 2021). At NUS and NTU universities, staff at all levels of Student Affairs have expertise in disciplines such as counseling management, psychology, and education, along with qualifications or licenses in related fields. New employees typically receive guidance from professional advisors or senior colleagues (Sun, X, Y., 2021).

In conclusion, it is evident that foreign universities have stringent criteria for selecting and hiring student affairs managers. These positions are typically filled by full-time teams with appropriate academic credentials and professional experience, and new hires receive training and guidance from experienced staff members.

Inspiration of student development theories on student affairs administration in higher vocational colleges

Fine Cultural Atmosphere

Over the span of a century, the Communist Party of China has influenced the social environment and shaped the youthful image during the New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement. The party has encouraged young people to actively engage in defending the country during significant national events such as participating in the construction of Four Modernizations and realizing the Chinese Dream of rejuvenating the nation. According to student development theory, meaningful participation in activities leads to greater recognition and gains for students. (Long, D., 2012b). Therefore, creating a positive cultural atmosphere in higher vocational colleges is crucial for guiding students' formation of a positive personality.

Institutionalized Transformation of Student Affairs Administration

The Regulations on the Construction of College Counselors' Teams (*Ministry of Education Order No. 43, 2017*) states that counselors play a role in organizing, implementing, and guiding the daily affairs management of college students. Currently, student affairs administration in China is not generally centralized but distributed among various administrative departments in colleges and universities, leading to a two-tier management system and communication gaps between departments. Consistency and standardization are needed for frontline work facing students to eliminate uncertainty in work standards and establish the authority of the college. Institutionalization and legalization are essential for enhancing the professionalism and cartelization of the counselor team participating in frontline student affairs administration (Xu, SH. F., 2022).

Therefore, the legalization of college student affairs administration aims to establish a robust institutional mechanism, safeguard the immediate interests of students, and provide enhanced conditions for their on-campus study.

One-stop Service and Information Service on Students' development

In foreign universities, the student affairs administration agency is typically established at the school level and directly responsible for handling all aspects of student affairs (Sun, Y. W. & Han, R, P., 2022). However, in most Chinese universities, multiple departments are involved in student affairs work, which can result in inconsistent treatment of similar issues and give students the impression of arbitrary management. This ultimately affects subsequent management efforts (Li, J. D., 2018).

Currently, some Chinese universities have implemented a "one-stop service center for students," where the Student Affairs Department coordinates a centralized service model involving various departments to assist students in resolving practical difficulties (Tang, H.T.,

2017; Zhang, Y. F., 2022; Yu, J. J., 2022). This approach has partially contributed to smooth implementation of student affairs administration and meeting diverse needs. Therefore, it is imperative for Chinese universities to expand one-stop services and establish a comprehensive student affairs administration system.

Career Development for Student Affairs Administrators

The Ministry of Education's Regulation No. 43 (2017) clearly defines the responsibilities of college counselors in managing student affairs. Although counselors hold teaching positions, their professional identity and social status are still lower than that of professional teachers (Sun, Y. W. & Han, R. P., 2022). Counselors are tasked with educating, managing, and providing services to students while dealing with substantial workload information that requires frequent updates. They often face significant work pressure; however, there is a perception that anyone can handle counseling duties without strict requirements (Li, J. D., 2018; Sun, Y. W. & Han, R. P., 2022). In the actual process of management work, the absence of a scientific and rational evaluation system can lead to a decline in work enthusiasm and sense of belonging among student affairs managers. Additionally, the busy nature of student affairs consumes counselors' time, limiting their opportunities for theoretical learning and scientific research (Zhang, J., 2015; Sun, Y. W. & Han, R. P., 2022).

Therefore, emphasizing the professional development of student affairs managers is beneficial for enhancing the professionalism of the student affairs administration team and providing improved educational and management services for students. It also contributes to enhancing talent cultivation quality.

Conclusion

The student affairs administration in higher education institutions exerts a subtle yet profound impact on students' developmental trajectory during their academic tenure. The theory of student development offers valuable insights into this matter, emphasizing that the objective of student management work extends beyond ensuring the smooth functioning of a group of students residing and studying in a vocational college. Instead, it encompasses fostering the holistic growth and progress of students' lives as the primary purpose of such management efforts. By drawing upon successful practices implemented by foreign higher education institutions in managing student affairs, vocational colleges can transcend the limitations imposed by one-dimensional approaches to enhance their support systems from multiple dimensions, including human influence and environmental factors, thereby facilitating students' attainment of higher quality and more meaningful life development.

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