

Establishing a Student Development Support Service System in Higher Education Institutions from an Educational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the modernization of higher education, establishing an appropriate student development support service system has become a core dimension for fulfilling the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education. Based on an educational theory framework, this paper explores a systematic reconstruction paradigm for such a system. It first establishes the value orientation grounded in the holistic development perspective as its theoretical foundation. At the same time, the evolution of management paradigms toward developmental support reflects the objective demands of higher education's intrinsic development. Current university practices face structural challenges in epistemological positioning, service architecture, and evaluation mechanisms, including fragmented functional roles, resource allocation, and a lack of quantifiable developmental outcomes. This paper proposes a system-reconstruction pathway centered on student development: implementing top-level institutional integration to establish strategic direction, creating a cross-departmental collaborative content-modular supply system, and constructing a developmental evaluation loop based on student growth indicators. This forms an educational governance solution encompassing objectives, supply, and evaluation.

KEYWORDS

Educational perspective; University student development; Support service system

1 Introduction

The intrinsic value of higher education transcends mere information transmission, fostering students' agency-building for development. Contemporary university education must prioritize learner-centered developmental imperatives. Examining current practices, many institutions still adhere to traditional control-oriented paradigms, fixating on order maintenance and risk avoidance—failing to accommodate students' diverse developmental needs. The discourse of student affairs is undergoing a paradigm shift from "management and control" to "developmental support." This transition represents not merely a semantic change but a fundamental transformation in educational philosophy: it demands recognition of students' agency as developmental agents, compelling universities to evolve from authoritative administrators into professional developmental collaborators. Consequently, there is an urgent need to return to the fundamental principles of education, implement systemic restructuring of existing service frameworks, and establish a genuinely empowering developmental support system that fosters student growth.

2 Educational theoretical implications of constructing student development support service systems

2.1 Holistic development philosophy as the fundamental value orientation of student support service systems

The holistic development philosophy is the cornerstone of modern pedagogy, profoundly challenging utilitarian perspectives that reduce higher education solely to vocational preparation. It asserts that education's ultimate goal lies in fostering harmonious development across multiple dimensions—knowledge, skills, emotions, character, and physical and mental well-being. When this philosophy guides the overarching design of student support services, it infuses the entire system with purpose. This means service design must transcend a reactive logic of "problem-solving" or "addressing weaknesses." Its core mission shifts from merely resolving academic challenges or psychological barriers to proactively creating an empowering environment that stimulates potential, encourages individual exploration, and cultivates well-rounded character. Guided by this philosophy, the focus of work shifts from reactive response to proactive construction^[1]. Attention must extend beyond assessing the depth of students' academic weaknesses to recognizing the potential of their academic strengths. Support should move beyond remedial interventions to developmental guidance.

2.2 The inevitable transition from traditional student management to developmental support services

The shift toward developmental support services in higher education institutions is fundamentally a process of institutional restructuring to meet contemporary demands. Generational shifts among educational stakeholders drive this transformation: as a cohort raised in the information age's ecological environment, contemporary university students

exhibit significantly heightened self-awareness and rights consciousness, rendering traditional bureaucratic management models increasingly unrecognized. Students universally seek personalized development guidance grounded in professional paradigms and intersubjective dialogue. Rigid administrative models not only provoke adversarial responses but also undermine educational effectiveness. A deeper driver lies in the structural shift in societal talent demand paradigms. Knowledge-innovation-driven societies no longer require homogeneous practitioners but versatile talents equipped with critical thinking, creative endowments, and sound character cultivation ^[2]. Cultivating such advanced competencies fundamentally relies on establishing an academic community environment that respects individual autonomy and supports exploratory growth.

2.3 Building a systematic service system as the core guarantee for implementing the task of cultivating morality and talent

Cultivating morality and talent is the fundamental mission of education in China's new era. However, any grand educational concept must find concrete practical vehicles to avoid becoming a hollow slogan. The core organizational guarantee is establishing a systematic student development support service system that integrates horizontal collaboration and vertical continuity. Its underlying logic is that fostering virtue and nurturing talent is a systemic endeavor permeating the entire educational process—it cannot be achieved solely through a few ideological and political courses or thematic activities. Students' moral cultivation and competency development occur predominantly within their daily learning, living, and social interactions. A systematic support service framework functions like a sophisticated neural network, organically decomposing educational objectives and integrating them into every critical developmental scenario during a student's campus experience. Through this approach, the service system transforms abstract educational goals into tangible support initiatives that students can actively engage with and experience. This provides a robust organizational and practical foundation for fostering virtue and nurturing talent.

3 Current challenges in higher education student development support systems

3.1 Misaligned service philosophy: support functions disconnected from educational goals

The most fundamental challenge facing many university student support systems today stems not from resource constraints, but from a deeply ingrained misalignment within organizational culture. Management-centric thinking continues to dominate service practices. In numerous institutions, student affairs departments' primary objective remains to ensure campus stability and maintain teaching order. Under this risk-averse philosophy, prioritizing stability over student development, many support services have essentially devolved into reactive management—addressing problems and preventing issues—rather than proactive support that fosters growth and unleashes potential. This conceptual deviation manifests particularly starkly in practice ^[3]. Academic warning mechanisms may overly focus on identifying students at risk of withdrawal to avoid negative metrics, rather than proactively helping students diagnose the root causes of their learning difficulties. Similarly, mental health interventions may concentrate on managing existing crisis cases rather than allocating more resources to enhance the psychological resilience of the entire student body. This operational logic, driven by preventing incidents rather than fostering growth, directly leads to a profound disconnect between the functions of support services and their intended educational objectives. Consequently, much of the work remains confined to the superficial level of maintaining order.

3.2 Compartmentalized service content fragments support processes

Administrative silos within universities, formed by functional divisions, are the direct cause of fragmented support services and disjointed processes. Typically, academic development falls under the Academic Affairs Office, career planning to the Career Center, mental health to the Counseling Center, and daily management to the Student Affairs Office. This compartmentalized structure fundamentally overlooks the holistic nature of student development needs. A student's observable behaviors often reflect a complex interplay of internal states. For instance, a sudden decline in academic performance may stem not from insufficient learning ability, but from a loss of motivation due to career uncertainty or severe psychological distress caused by interpersonal conflicts. Within a compartmentalized service system, students are forced to navigate between departments in confusion, seeking help. The Academic Affairs Office may only see their declining GPA, while the Counseling Center focuses solely on their anxiety. No single department can provide an integrated diagnostic and support plan. The student's genuine, complex needs thus fall through the cracks between departments, receiving no systematic response.

3.3 Evaluation mechanisms prioritize management over development, hindering service effectiveness

As a guiding force, evaluation mechanisms profoundly shape an organization's work direction. Current university evaluations of student support services exhibit a pronounced tendency to prioritize management over development, fundamentally constraining service effectiveness. Many assessment frameworks focus evaluation metrics on easily quantifiable KPIs—such as the number of events organized, service coverage figures, safety incident rates, or graduate initial employment rates. However, due to a widespread lack of effective measurement for student growth and value-added outcomes, service work easily falls into internal competition, pursuing superficial data prosperity. Staff energy may be heavily consumed by organizing events and filling out reports. At the same time, long-term initiatives like service model innovation lack sufficient motivation due to the absence of evaluation-driven incentives.

4 Pathways to building a student-centered integrated development support service system

4.1 Establishing an integrated service framework guided by student holistic development

The primary solution to current challenges lies not in piecemeal fixes but in establishing a strategic, integrated framework centered on student holistic development. This demands that university decision-makers break free from administrative-centric thinking and instead reverse-engineer the entire service system based on the complete growth cycle of students^[4]. Integration necessitates establishing a robust cross-departmental coordination mechanism at the institutional level, such as forming a Student Development Support Committee. Senior university administrators should lead this committee and include participation from all relevant departments, including Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, the Communist Youth League Committee, and academic departments. The committee's core responsibility is to clarify the educational essence of student development support services and establish unified institutional service philosophies and objectives. More importantly, this top-level design fosters a campus-wide culture of holistic education, encouraging all faculty and staff to view supporting student development as an intrinsic duty. Only then can currently fragmented service units be integrated into a cohesive, goal-aligned educational community.

4.2 Integrating multi-departmental resources to develop integrated support modules for academic, career, and psychological development

Guided by this unified top-level design, the implementation path involves breaking down departmental silos and systematically integrating diverse resources through project-based, modular approaches. Modularization signifies a fundamental shift in service delivery logic. Rather than departments merely showcasing existing services, it involves multiple departments collaboratively developing customized service modules based on insights into students' real challenges. For instance, a university adaptation and academic launch module could be jointly developed for first-year students, integrating course selection guidance, major exploration, stress management, and information literacy training. Similarly, a Future Transition and Empowerment module could be developed for upper-level students, organically integrating job-seeking skills training, graduate school planning guidance, alum experience sharing, and graduation season emotional counseling. This project-based approach, oriented toward solving students' comprehensive challenges, effectively focuses the professional strengths of different departments on shared goals. It achieves deep integration of service content, providing students with seamless, one-stop growth support^[5].

4.3 Establishing a process-oriented and developmental evaluation feedback mechanism based on student growth value-added

The core lever driving the continuous optimization of a developmental support system lies in a structural shift in the evaluation paradigm—constructing a developmental assessment mechanism grounded in the theory of student growth value-added. This framework encompasses dual evaluation dimensions: process evaluation dynamically monitors service experiences through longitudinal tracking surveys, focus group interviews, and real-time feedback systems, thereby establishing a rapid iteration mechanism responsive to needs; Growth-oriented evaluation, supported by digital portfolio ecosystems and competency benchmarking tools, systematically tracks substantive progress across cognitive literacy, social competence, and affective attitudes. Linking baseline assessments at enrollment with graduation evaluations precisely measures value-added contributions throughout the educational journey. This paradigm shift achieves a dual displacement of value focus: moving from administratively driven hard metrics to a developmental evidence chain oriented toward growth validity. It constructs an efficacy diagnostic model benchmarked against competency value-added curves. Ultimately, it forms an optimized system encompassing data collection, multidimensional analysis, strategy adaptation, and resource reallocation. Its self-driving nature manifests in directly converting assessment data into

endogenous drivers for service system iteration.

5 Conclusion

The fundamental imperative of the student development support system in higher education lies in achieving a paradigm shift from management-centered to development-centered approaches. The current challenges stem from institutional path dependence, including misaligned service philosophies, fragmented resource structures, and rigid evaluation standards. Future restructuring must adhere to a student-centered logic: establishing direction through top-level institutional integration, reorganizing service modules via cross-departmental collaboration, and establishing dynamic optimization mechanisms based on growth-value-added evaluations.

About the Author

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