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Postprint: An Exploration of Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation for Network and New Media Majors

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Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

At the intersection of technological convergence, media convergence, and disciplinary convergence, the Network and New Media program shoulders the critical responsibility of reforming and upgrading journalism and communication disciplines. Investigating aspects such as the program's development direction, training objectives, curriculum system, and teaching methodologies offers significant benefits for identifying development pathways for journalism and communication disciplines. This study proposes a set of fundamental principles for cultivating interdisciplinary talents in the Network and New Media program, drawing upon common challenges currently faced by domestic universities in program construction, reform suggestions proposed by relevant scholars, and successful experiences from pioneering institutions, thereby providing a reference for the integrated development of industry and academia.

Full Text

Preamble

An Analysis of Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation in Network and New Media Programs

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Abstract: At the intersection of technological convergence, media convergence, and disciplinary integration, the Network and New Media major shoulders the heavy responsibility of reforming and upgrading journalism and communication disciplines. Exploring the development direction, training objectives, curriculum system, and teaching methods of the Network and New Media major is highly beneficial for seeking a developmental path for journalism and communication

disciplines. This study proposes a set of basic principles for interdisciplinary talent cultivation in Network and New Media programs, drawing from the common problems currently encountered by domestic institutions in constructing this major, reform suggestions proposed by relevant scholars, and successful experiences explored by some institutions, thereby providing a reference for the integrated development of the industry and the discipline.

Keywords: Network and New Media; Media Convergence; Interdisciplinary Integration; New Liberal Arts; Interdisciplinary Talent

Classification Code: G621

Document Code: A

Article ID: 1671-0134(2021)10-129-03

DOI: 10.19483/j.cnki.11-4653/n.2021.10.039

Citation Format: Wang Yidan, Li Weirong. An Analysis of Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation in Network and New Media Programs [J]. *China Media Technology*, 2021(10): 129-131.

2. Literature Review

Along with the rapid advancement of digital technology, the integrated development of all-media, and the vigorous growth of the Internet, the media industry has put forward more diverse and complex demands for talent, also presenting new challenges for journalism and communication talent cultivation in universities. Because the professional development time is relatively short, academic research on the construction of Network and New Media programs is still insufficient, but with the rapid advancement of information technology and the transformation of the media industry, the significance of research on new media talent cultivation will gradually become prominent. Against this backdrop, Network and New Media emerged as a new major, representing both an improvement and upgrade to the journalism and communication talent cultivation framework, and an endogenous reform based on the integrated development of journalism and communication disciplines. This review mainly unfolds from several aspects: the origin of the major's establishment, its current development status, cultivation philosophy, and curriculum structure system.

“Network and New Media” (major code: 050306T) was officially approved by the Ministry of Education in 2012 and classified under the category of Journalism and Communication. Tracing the development trajectory of this major, it can be roughly divided into three stages: The first stage was the institutional exploration period, represented by the “Network News” undergraduate program at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in the late 1990s; the second stage was between 2000 and 2010, when the Ministry of Education piloted the “New Media and Information Network” major at selected institutions and included it in the 2010 undergraduate major catalog; the third stage began in 2012 and continues to the present, when the Ministry of Education adjusted the undergraduate education major catalog, replacing “New Media and Infor-

mation Network” with “Network and New Media Major” (hereinafter referred to as “Network and New Media Major”), thus propelling the major into a fast track of development.[?]

On the one hand, technological convergence has driven the current “media convergence” development trend in the media industry. Andrew Nachison, Director of the Media Research Center at the American Press Institute, defines “media convergence” as “the strategic, operational, and cultural alliance among print, audio, video, and interactive digital media organizations.” [?] Based on three levels—macro strategy, specific operations, and cultural foundation—the organization and development of converged media require practitioners to have in-depth understanding and recognition of converged media, and to actively carry out communication work within this technological environment.

On the other hand, media convergence has also promoted the interdisciplinary integration of journalism and communication disciplines. As information technology gradually penetrates the communication environment, teaching and research in journalism and communication cannot remain complacent or constrained by traditional disciplinary systems. Instead, they should integrate disciplines such as information technology, computer science, and artificial intelligence, and conduct teaching and research with an interdisciplinary perspective that combines both liberal arts and sciences to solve complex problems in contemporary society and cultivate interdisciplinary talent with cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills.

Regarding the cultivation philosophy and positioning of the Network and New Media major, scholar Zhang Hebin’ s perspective enjoys high recognition in academia. In his article “The Origin, Dynamics, and Construction of the Network and New Media Major,” he points out that the cultivation positioning of the major should accomplish four transformations: “from journalist to media professional, from news communication to information communication, from traditional media to online new media, and from traditional online media to mobile online media.” [?] This demonstrates that the interdisciplinary and composite talent requirements of the new media industry have important guiding value for talent cultivation in higher education institutions.

Regarding the curriculum structure system of the Network and New Media major, many scholars have adopted different perspectives for research. For instance, in her thesis “Research on Talent Cultivation Models for Network and New Media Majors in Chinese Universities—Based on the Perspective of Curriculum Design and Reform,” Cai Yunqi categorizes the curriculum design of the Network and New Media major into four models based on its integration degree with traditional journalism and communication disciplines: the “traditional journalism courses + Internet application technology” model, establishing an entirely new professional curriculum system, simultaneously developing traditional journalism education and new media professional teaching, and adhering to the traditional journalism education curriculum model. She argues that the major’ s curriculum should be rooted in communication studies to better align with the

major's connotation and extension.[?] Additionally, Tao Jianjie and Lin Jingke, in their article "Skills, Knowledge, and Literacy: The Current State and Practical Response of Undergraduate Talent Cultivation in Chinese Journalism and Communication," examine the curriculum system of Network and New Media majors in domestic institutions from three dimensions—skills, knowledge, and literacy—and find that many programs overemphasize technical courses such as web design and data mining while lacking a return to the core of journalism and communication disciplines, resulting in vague and generalized cultivation objectives.[?] Some studies also adopt a horizontal comparative perspective, examining the talent cultivation philosophies, curriculum designs, and teaching methods of related majors abroad, providing certain reference significance for domestic reform and development.[?] It can be seen that the Network and New Media major is naturally correlated with integrated and interdisciplinary talent cultivation, but a clear disciplinary framework is needed for its institutionalization. Therefore, sorting out the hierarchical structure of the major's curriculum is key to constructing the Network and New Media curriculum system.

3. Principles for Interdisciplinary Talent Cultivation in Network and New Media Programs

Based on the representative reform proposals put forward by various institutions in recent years during the process of promoting Network and New Media major construction, the common problems currently emerging in domestic institutions' construction of the major, relevant scholars' reform suggestions, and the successful experiences explored by some institutions, this study proposes a set of basic principles for interdisciplinary talent cultivation in Network and New Media programs: "grounded in communication theory and journalism practice, oriented by student interest development, oriented by industry talent requirements, and oriented by research methodology mastery," abbreviated as "one foundation, three orientations."

3.1 Grasping the Foundation of Journalism and Communication Discipline

According to the undergraduate education major catalog issued by the Ministry of Education, the "Network and New Media" major is classified under the category of Journalism and Communication. Therefore, mastering the laws and methods of information dissemination constitutes the basic disciplinary literacy and knowledge foundation for students in this major. Centered on this core, courses such as Introduction to Communication Studies, Introduction to Journalism, and news gathering, writing, editing, commentary, and photography should be the core professional courses for students, which needs to be reflected through the support matrix of the professional talent cultivation plan and the weight distribution of core professional courses. If institutions blindly pursue industry development by exclusively offering interdisciplinary courses such as computer programming, visual design, or converged media design, they would

be putting the cart before the horse. Students would only master technical skills while having a vague perception of their disciplinary foundation, making it easy for them to skim the surface during knowledge framework construction and lack systematic understanding of the discipline.

Therefore, the disciplinary framework should be constructed progressively with journalism and communication as the foundation and core. For instance, established journalism and communication universities such as Renmin University of China, Wuhan University, and Fudan University have adopted the “traditional journalism courses + Internet application technology” model, which superimposes new media-related courses onto the original complete curriculum system without breaking it, achieving interdisciplinary talent cultivation for the Network and New Media major through incremental additions and realizing an integrated curriculum that connects traditional and new media courses.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of New Liberal Arts construction, although New Liberal Arts emphasizes “integration” among disciplines, as Professor Han Jingtai from Beijing Language and Culture University stated, “In the process of integrating liberal arts and sciences, the essence of ‘liberal arts’ should not be obscured; after the convergence of liberal arts and sciences, the characteristics of ‘liberal arts’ must be valued and highlighted even more.” [?] New Liberal Arts construction ultimately needs to focus on cultivating students’ humanistic literacy and social insight capabilities. If institutions only focus on disciplinary integration and skill accumulation, students will lose the fundamental humanistic and social nature of the journalism and communication discipline.

3.2 Building a Modular Curriculum System

The new media industry’ s requirements for talent literacy include multiple dimensions such as journalism and communication, political economy, advertising and marketing, broadcasting and hosting, art design, and computer technology, with quite extensive extensions. Simply continuing the traditional “academic” journalism and communication talent cultivation program can no longer meet the development needs of the journalism and communication industry and Internet industry in the new media era. After establishing the journalism and communication foundation of the Network and New Media major, it is necessary to expand students’ competency boundaries on this basis. The direction of these boundary expansions requires students to make corresponding choices based on their own interests, so students need to have detailed observation and in-depth understanding of their career planning and industry development during their learning process. This also requires students to proactively establish a clear positioning for themselves during their studies, acquire knowledge and cultivate abilities with themselves at the center, and mobilize their own proactive learning enthusiasm. The following are some models that have been successfully attempted in universities.

3.2.1 Curriculum System Institutions can develop interdisciplinary “menu-style” course packages based on the relevance of disciplines and industry talent requirements, with different course packages adapted to corresponding interdisciplinary talent cultivation directions. Students can select cultivation directions for further study according to the appropriate course packages, avoiding the lack of logical relationships and knowledge coherence in the curriculum system that results from students selecting courses on their own. For example, Huazhong University of Science and Technology has established interdisciplinary course packages such as the “All-Media Journalism Course Package,” “Audio-Visual Converged Media Course Package,” and “Brand Communication and Digital Creativity Course Package” within its journalism major, accomplishing multi-major and multi-directional interdisciplinary talent cultivation.[?]

3.2.2 Training Formats Institutions can conduct concentrated professional training and practice through a “mini-semester” format. For instance, Communication University of China has added a four-week mini-semester between the spring and fall semesters specifically for the teaching arrangement of practical courses. This avoids conflicts with exam-based courses and enables students to concentrate their time and energy on editing and producing works, thereby accumulating sufficient portfolio experience for subsequent internship applications and employment interviews.[?]

3.2.3 Degree Conferral The degree conferral for the Network and New Media major can also reference current practices in journalism programs at some comprehensive universities by conducting interdisciplinary major cultivation and degree conferral, thereby accomplishing the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge, literacy, and skills. Institutions can establish double majors related to new media, encouraging students to select interdisciplinary minors based on their interests and research directions, and ultimately obtain degree certificates in the form of “Network and New Media + X,” such as “Network and New Media + Computer Science,” “Network and New Media + Visual Communication,” and “Network and New Media + Advertising and Marketing.” [?][?] Cultivated through this approach, students will have great potential for employment or further study in these interdisciplinary fields, capable of continuously injecting fresh blood into the new media industry and thereby promoting its development.

3.3 Realizing the Integration of Production, Teaching, and Learning

According to current teaching methods for technical skills courses, students only focus on completing classroom assignments during their learning process while neglecting the conceptual communication, audience positioning, and overall completion quality of their works. Consequently, students find it difficult to present complete project works to prospective employers upon graduation and struggle to demonstrate their mastery of communication abilities through these works, which greatly affects their employment rates. To enable students

to solidly master technical skills and smoothly transition to the career stage, institutions need to promptly follow industry development and enhance the integration among production, teaching, and learning. Institutions can undertake work in the following three aspects.

3.3.1 Integrated Faculty Institutions can strengthen interaction between universities and industries by introducing relevant industry experts into the teaching faculty and actively implementing a dual-teacher system. They can lower the academic credential requirements for industry teachers and explore diverse cooperation methods such as lectures, salons, teaching, skill training, and project introduction. Simultaneously, institutions need to intensify training for in-house faculty, encouraging young teachers to undergo periodic training and learning at relevant enterprises, thereby transmitting advanced industry concepts and work models to students in the classroom.

3.3.2 Project-Based Teaching Since the Network and New Media major involves numerous applied courses, the exploration and reform of teaching methods for such courses directly affect the quality of talent cultivation. Teachers can attempt to transform from process-based content delivery to project-based research-oriented teaching. In completing projects, students consolidate knowledge learned in courses and even self-study relevant knowledge beyond the curriculum, similar to the Capstone course format in American universities. This approach guides students to learn by doing and do by learning, collaborating with students from multi-professional backgrounds to complete projects. Through interdisciplinary project practice, students develop teamwork abilities, interpersonal communication skills, and problem-solving capabilities.

3.3.3 Laboratory Construction The Network and New Media major has high requirements for practical operations, making the construction of relevant multimedia laboratories extremely important. Equipment for traditional media such as filming, recording, editing, and broadcasting is indispensable, while new media-specific facilities like converged media audio-video production centers, virtual simulation centers, and 5G laboratories should also be fully equipped. Given the high cost of laboratory construction, institutions can consider jointly establishing relevant laboratories with industry media and enterprises, providing conditions for students' practical operations and creative works. On this cooperative foundation, works produced by students can also be directly put into industry use, thereby helping students enter real communication environments for practical combat and achieving joint interaction between teaching practice and frontline media operations.

3.4 Emphasizing Research Methodology Courses

Previously, research methodology courses were a relatively weak link in Chinese journalism and communication education, mostly appearing at the graduate

level in sociology-related disciplines. However, it can be observed that such courses are now increasingly being shifted to the undergraduate level. The reason lies in the fact that with the rapid development of computer technology, the data produced on the Internet has become increasingly abundant and massive, making data collection and analysis capabilities one of the essential skills for new media practitioners and scholars. For the career development of Network and New Media students, whether entering the Internet industry to engage in new media operations or product management, entering the journalism industry to conduct news investigations—especially the emerging “precision journalism” in recent years—or pursuing further academic research, the ability to conduct quantitative and qualitative social research is an essential skill for students. Meanwhile, the offering of research methodology courses also reflects the interdisciplinary talent cultivation philosophy in journalism and communication education, shifting from traditional “humanities training” to emphasizing both “humanities + science” training. Therefore, whether from the perspective of diversified cultivation objectives or interdisciplinary integration of liberal arts and sciences, research methodology courses hold significant value.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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