

An Analysis of General Education Curriculum Development Pathways in Universities under the College System: A Case Study of Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai) Postprint

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Abstract

General education constitutes a vital component of talent cultivation in contemporary higher education institutions, representing not only an educational model but also an educational philosophy. As products of historical development, academies have assumed distinct historical missions across different eras. This article takes the academy system as its point of departure, using the general education curriculum at Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai) as a case study, to explore and analyze new approaches to the construction of general education curricula in universities within the framework of the current academy system.

Full Text

An Analysis of Approaches to General Education Curriculum Construction in Universities from the Perspective of the Academy System: A Case Study of Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai)

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Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai)

General education constitutes a vital component of contemporary university talent cultivation, representing not merely an educational model but fundamentally an educational philosophy. As a product of historical development, academies have assumed varying missions across different eras. This article takes the academy system as its point of departure and examines the general education curriculum at Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai) to explore and analyze

new pathways for constructing university general education curricula within the academy system framework.

Keywords: Academy System; General Education; Construction Approaches

[1] China's higher education bears the significant responsibility of cultivating outstanding talent for national development, with moral cultivation being the foundation of education. As General Secretary Xi Jinping explicitly stated in the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China must "implement the strategy for invigorating China through science and education and strengthen support for modernization through talent development." Aligned with this objective, contemporary university students must not only develop robust professional competencies but also refine their moral character and undertake the historic mission of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Implementing general education among university students represents a crucial approach to strengthening their sense of national identity, enhancing cultural literacy, and elevating moral sentiment. Reconciling students' developmental needs with the demands of the times has become a critical issue for university development. Presently, numerous domestic universities have established academies with diverse forms and functions, which have effectively promoted the integration of general and professional education and fostered whole-person education.

I. The Connotation of General Education

General education represents not merely an educational model but fundamentally an educational philosophy. Its objective is to equip learners with knowledge and values that transcend different communities in modern pluralistic society, enabling them to possess the exemplary qualities of independent personality and critical thinking akin to "great scholars and thinkers."

Since general education lacks rigid professional divisions, it emphasizes "nurturing" rather than "instruction," constituting a form of humanities education that transcends utilitarianism and practicality. It provides students with diverse choices, allowing them to develop freely and naturally rather than being manufactured as uniform "products" on an assembly line.

Due to historical reasons, China has long struggled with excessive specialization and narrow disciplinary focus, with students beginning to separate into arts and sciences tracks in secondary school. The emergence of general education has mitigated the negative consequences of this problem to some extent. Therefore, general education can be considered the most effective approach to comprehensively implementing quality education, a vivid embodiment of contemporary "university spirit," and a practical process of continuously adapting modern educational concepts to the Chinese context. Presently, whether China's long-standing quality education and holistic development model emphasizing moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education, or foreign educational models such as liberal arts education, whole-person education, and quality

development training, all fall within the scope of general education. This inclusiveness demonstrates that Chinese general education possesses both Chinese characteristics and a global orientation. To a certain degree, we can employ the philosophy of general education to integrate diverse modern educational concepts and models, thereby endowing general education with the connotation of traditional Chinese culture while reflecting both contemporaneity and national character.

II. Practice Models of General Education in Domestic and Foreign Universities

General education originated from the Western concept of liberal education, when numerous scholars believed that excessive academic compartmentalization had severely fragmented students' knowledge and weakened their ability to think independently and integrate knowledge, thereby giving rise to general education.

American general education traces its origins to the first general education movement in 1825. Over its nearly 200-year development, both the philosophy and models of general education have become relatively well-established. In higher education, the United States emphasizes the integration of general education philosophy, highlighting the important role of classic works in talent cultivation. Carefully selected classical and modern masterpieces serve as optimal materials for general education courses; for instance, the University of Chicago offers general education courses in classic literature reading across all undergraduate grades.[2] Additionally, American general education focuses more on broadening students' horizons and training fundamental skills such as logical thinking and written communication. Harvard University's general education curriculum, for example, encompasses six domains including literature and arts, society, ethics, history, science, and foreign cultures, enabling students to acquire comprehensive theoretical knowledge and practical skills during their university years.

European higher education tends to integrate general education with professional education rather than establishing explicit requirements for general education courses, instead permeating general education philosophy throughout the educational process. In terms of curriculum design, Europe primarily provides students with a comprehensive knowledge foundation through establishing disciplinary clusters, offering interdisciplinary courses, and creating joint majors. For example, Oxford University constructs students' complete knowledge systems through joint majors, including double majors, triple majors, and major-minor combinations. It can be argued that the European model of general education in higher education is implicit, with general education philosophy fully integrated into curriculum objectives, structure, and content.

Currently, most Chinese universities adopt the "public required courses + general education electives" model for general education. In terms of implementation vehicles, they primarily employ optimized curriculum design and establish specialized institutions such as general education colleges or academies. For in-

stance, Zhejiang University established the “Qiushi Academy” to complement its general education initiatives, proposing a “6+1” model for general education electives in 2018 and creating a specialized management body responsible for researching and establishing general education objectives, policies, and measures. Peking University founded the “Yuanpei College,” implementing an academy system that breaks the boundaries of professional education and enables interdisciplinary and diversified learning. Fudan University launched its “General Education” curriculum system in 2006, comprehensively implemented the “Academy System” in 2012, and subsequently continuously promoted the diversified “2+X” training system, providing new reference directions for general education reform in Chinese universities.

III. Exploration of Academy General Education Courses at HIT (Weihai)

Since 2015, Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai) has been constructing distinctive student academies guided by the philosophy of ubiquitous general education, characterized by academy-college collaborative cultivation and an “eight integrations” model. The university currently operates six academies—Dingxiang, Yahe, Wutong, Jinsong, Zhuxian, and Haitang—covering all undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral student dormitories. These academies integrate and excavate various general education resources, employ over one hundred internal and external academy mentors, maintain nearly one hundred student societies, develop numerous popular general education training courses and lectures, and organize a series of vibrant academy activities, thereby striving to create a ubiquitous general education platform for students’ comprehensive development.[3]

1. System Construction of General Education Courses at HIT (Weihai)

A distinctive feature of general education courses is their diversity. To better construct its general education curriculum, HIT (Weihai) established a General Education Working Group, formulated the “General Education Curriculum System Construction Plan” for the Weihai campus, and revised it several times in accordance with campus realities and adjustments to university policies. This resulted in a distinctive academy general education curriculum system that divides academy general education courses into seven modules:

General Education Curriculum Framework System of Harbin Institute of Technology (Weihai) Academy

2. Practical Exploration of Academy General Education Courses at HIT (Weihai)

Academy general education constitutes an essential component of HIT (Weihai)’s distinctive academy education model. From establishing the General Education Working Group in 2016 to successfully offering 134 general education

courses by 2020, the university' s general education has gradually progressed toward standardization and systematization. The innovative small-class teaching and experiential learning model of academy general education courses has received positive feedback from students, not only enabling them to experience artistic charm but also enhancing the influence of cultural literacy on students.[5]

HIT (Weihai) has integrated internal and external mentor resources in alignment with its campus general education curriculum framework, forming a distinctive academy general education system.[5] In the fall semester of 2020, HIT (Weihai) academies invited 21 external mentors to offer 19 courses covering traditional cultural aspects such as paper-cutting and tin inlay, as well as aesthetic dimensions including vocal music, dance, fine arts, calligraphy, tea ceremony, and opera. All courses employed small-class instruction with hands-on practice, yielding substantial benefits for students. These offerings also enriched the campus aesthetic and arts general education curriculum system, promoted students' appreciation of life aesthetics, and particularly enhanced the comprehensive qualities of science and engineering students.[5]

3. Analysis of Academy General Education Curriculum Construction at HIT (Weihai)

HIT (Weihai)' s academy construction is student-centered, uses academies as its vehicle, aims at student growth and success, employs societies as its main thread, utilizes teacher-student and peer interactions as its method, and leverages academy facilities and environments as its conditions. This approach creates a personalized, shared learning space that integrates student learning, development, and living, while exploring a ubiquitous general education system of "academy + college" collaborative cultivation.

- (1) The academies adhere to an "eight integrations" construction model: academy-college integration, general education-professional education integration, mentor-student integration, individual leader-group integration, cross-grade and cross-disciplinary integration, commonality-characteristic integration, learning-cultivation integration, and activity-culture integration. They continuously improve mentor quantity and quality by employing professional course teachers including ideological and political theory instructors, distinguished alumni, professionals from enterprises and institutions, and renowned experts from various social and cultural groups as academy mentors, thereby enriching the university' s general education faculty.
- (2) During construction, the academies accommodate the university' s science and engineering background by exploring innovative ubiquitous general education models such as "community environment + general education," "student societies + general education," "MOOC + general education," and "classroom teaching + general education." These models integrate educational resources, activate educational vehicles, optimize educational

methods, employ small-class teaching and “menu-style” course selection, and fully mobilize students’ subjective initiative.

- (3) Despite the open and diverse nature of general education courses, each academy has gradually developed its own distinctive brand courses through continuous development, summarization, refinement, and innovation. For example, Dingxiang Academy offers career planning courses, Jinsong Academy introduces international courses, Wutong Academy conducts technological innovation courses, Yahe Academy provides elegant female development courses, and Zhuxian Academy focuses on literature and arts courses.

IV. Approaches to General Education Curriculum Construction under the Academy System Background

Although university academic affairs departments play important roles in constructing general education models, relying solely on one department makes accomplishing this task difficult. Academies break the traditional department-dominated organizational and management model, reconstructing relationships among various university units and better facilitating the formation of synergistic forces for rapid general education curriculum development.[6]

1. Building a High-Quality Mentor Database, Optimizing Resource Allocation, and Advancing Comprehensive Education

General education requires solid human and intellectual support. By building a high-quality mentor database, academies can rely on mentors to conduct comprehensive general education that expands students’ knowledge breadth, broadens their horizons, and enhances both humanistic and scientific literacy, ultimately cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talent. Additionally, quality mentor resources can support student growth and success. Through exploratory learning with students, mentors subtly influence students’ life attitudes and behavioral habits, invisibly enhancing their learning pathways and efficiency, and achieving the “four unifications” of transmitting values, imparting knowledge, resolving doubts, and nurturing character in teaching practice.

Building a quality mentor database means constructing a high-caliber, broad-disciplinary faculty team. In conducting general education, academies can establish professional mentors based on college disciplines, general education or growth mentors based on individual strengths and expertise, and invite renowned internal and external experts and alumni to interact with academy students. By emphasizing implicit education and general education, optimizing resource allocation through interdisciplinary integration and arts-sciences permeation, and advancing a new pattern of comprehensive education, students can consciously receive the baptism of excellent culture. This simultaneously promotes the systematic refinement of general education, enabling its creative transformation and innovative development.

2. Broadening Curriculum Content, Deepening Practical Experience, and Enhancing Process-Based Education

To construct general education curricula that unify general and professional education and align with social needs, academies must broaden curriculum content and orientation. By clarifying educational priorities and leveraging guiding functions, they can achieve organic integration of classroom theory and social practice. Using an “open curriculum teaching model” as its vehicle, academies can implement “menu-style” courses that students can “order,” [6] realizing the cross-integration of “public required courses + general education electives + academy characteristic courses” to ensure genuine full participation and interaction, thereby implementing general education effectively. Beyond this, academies should fully mobilize students’ subjective initiative, engaging them in practice to truly internalize knowledge and externalize it through action.

Under the collaborative academy-college education model, academy general education courses should be student-centered and developed in conjunction with mentors’ professional strengths. For instance, academies can offer floral arrangement art courses taught by specialized instructors, incorporating not only rich theoretical knowledge but also numerous practical operational skills. While developing students’ hands-on abilities, such courses gradually enhance their creative capacities, enabling them to absorb and internalize floral arrangement techniques. This further elevates students’ aesthetic taste and awareness, enriches their spiritual and cultural qualities, and some students have even entered the floral industry as professional florists, establishing excellent examples for peers and broadening employment pathways.

3. Streamlining Operational Mechanisms, Constructing Characteristic Academies, and Creating All-Round Education

During academy construction, consistency exists with colleges in terms of management objects, yet functional divisions inevitably overlap, causing institutional conflicts in daily operations. This necessitates sound top-level design, streamlined operational mechanisms, and systematic scientific planning to clarify relationships between academies and colleges in student management and education, forming interactive and coordinated mechanisms to better serve students.[7]

Academy construction represents a systematic project requiring integration with university characteristics to build unique cultural atmospheres tailored to academy themes and student development. For example, HIT (Weihai) ’s Jinsong Academy aims to enhance students’ international competencies. During construction, it emphasizes international cultural integration, establishes a dedicated international affairs office to answer student questions, and organizes activities such as “Global Panorama” to cultivate students’ international perspectives and cross-cultural communication abilities. Simultaneously, as the dormitory for computer science and mathematics majors, it conducts Internet-

era characteristic activities integrated with professional studies, becoming an internal component of student general education.

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Practice of Characteristic Labor Education in One-Stop Student Communities Based on Cultural Inheritance: A Case Study of “Shiguang Xiaochu” at Xidian University

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Labor education constitutes an essential component of the education system for university students in the new era, possessing comprehensive educational value

in cultivating morality, enhancing intelligence, strengthening physique, and nurturing aesthetic appreciation in students' growth and development. Strengthening labor education for university students in the new era holds significant importance for implementing the Party's educational policy, fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, and promoting students' all-around development. This article systematically examines the internal logic of conducting labor education practice in one-stop student communities based on cultural inheritance, and elaborates on the pathways and effectiveness of such labor education practice by combining the "Shiguang Xiaochu" labor education project at Xidian University.

Keywords: Labor Education; Culture; Shiguang Xiaochu

I. The Internal Logic of Conducting Labor Education Practice in One-Stop Student Communities Based on Cultural Inheritance

[1] At the National Education Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the need to adhere to the socialist path of educational development with Chinese characteristics and cultivate socialist builders and successors with comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physique, aesthetics, and labor. Labor education in universities constitutes an important element of the socialist education system with Chinese characteristics, determining the labor literacy and competence of young university students in the new era and serving as an irreplaceable cornerstone in their growth, development, and future prospects. The "integration of five educations" has become a fundamental trend in Chinese educational reform and development under the new era background. Universities must strive to "comprehensively construct a labor education system that reflects contemporary characteristics," emancipate minds, and innovate methods to integrate labor education with the other four educations—moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic—to cultivate new-era individuals capable of shouldering the great responsibility of national rejuvenation. Conducting labor education practice based on cultural inheritance represents an important pathway for one-stop student communities to effectively implement labor education under the "five educations integration" framework.[2]

One-stop student communities, as crucial venues for student learning and living, possess unique advantages in implementing labor education practice. First, conducting labor education practice in one-stop student communities enables effective utilization of labor resources in campus life. These communities provide rich practical venues and resources for students' daily life labor education, playing a significant role in student labor education. Universities can rely on one-stop student communities to provide students with rich labor experiences through work-study programs, community labor experiences, volunteer services, and other forms. They can also offer labor education courses on life skills tailored to community characteristics, enabling students to master labor skills and

improve labor capabilities. Second, one-stop student communities possess strong social attributes, and implementing labor education practice within them can further expand the educational functions of student communities. Universities can encourage and support students to implement self-management, self-service, self-education, and self-supervision, placing students as the main actors and fully mobilizing their subjective initiative to cultivate managerial talent and labor capabilities. Finally, conducting labor education practice in one-stop student communities can fully leverage the exemplary power of outstanding students. As the most densely populated areas for students, universities can use people and events from within the community to educate students.

The “Shiguang Xiaochu” labor education practice brand at Xidian University emphasizes cultural orientation in labor education. Based in one-stop student communities, it explores a new model of characteristic labor education practice in one-stop student communities founded on cultural inheritance, aiming to cultivate students’ labor consciousness through labor education practice. This enables students to obtain positively meaningful value experiences on the basis of understanding the world, learning to construct the world and shape themselves.

II. Implementation Methods of “Shiguang Xiaochu” Labor Education Practice

1. Practice Design

“Shiguang Xiaochu” draws nourishment from the repository of Chinese cultural resources, combining moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education. Taking dietary culture as its entry point, it creates four educational themes: “Festival Flavors,” “Gratitude Tastes,” “Red Meanings,” and “Contemporary Flavors,” guiding students to appreciate the essence and spirit of excellent traditional Chinese culture, the robustness of revolutionary culture, and the prosperity of advanced socialist culture through “culture on the tip of the tongue.” This enables students to see “China’s contribution to human civilization” from “China on the tip of the tongue” and strengthen cultural confidence.

“Festival Flavors” is rooted in excellent traditional Chinese culture, departing from traditional holidays that carry the national spirit and emotions of the Chinese people to consolidate humanistic foundations, stimulate students’ identification with Chinese culture, and enhance cultural confidence. During traditional Chinese festivals such as Spring Festival and Lantern Festival, specialized activities on festival food production and appreciation are conducted, including making dumplings, tangyuan, qingtuan, zongzi, and mooncakes, to improve culinary appreciation skills and inherit excellent traditional Chinese culture.

“Gratitude Tastes” is based on gratitude education, as gratitude represents a traditional Chinese virtue and an important moral emotion that enhances happiness and promotes prosocial behavior. Through activities such as “Mom’s Favorite Dishes,” students are taught to be grateful for their parents’ nurturing;

through “Anti-Epidemic Love Meals,” students are taught to appreciate frontline epidemic prevention workers.

“Red Meanings” draws nourishment from revolutionary culture, using red food culture as its main thread to revisit the extraordinary years of the revolutionary period, promote patriotism, and strengthen ideals and beliefs. Through activities such as “Red Study Tours” and “Red Memories on the Tip of the Tongue,” students learn revolutionary culture and genuinely enhance their firm confidence in Chinese spirit, Chinese values, and Chinese strength.

“Contemporary Flavors” is rooted in advanced socialist culture, using cuisine to depict the beautiful canvas of the new era and new journey and write the endless epic of the people’s history. Through activities such as “Proposal Competitions” and “Food Promotion,” students utilize new media platforms to tell China’s stories well, enrich the cultural connotation of labor education, and promote

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

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