Exploration on the Reform Path of General Education in Applied Private Undergraduate Colleges

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Abstract. At present, China's higher education is moving forward from popularization to universalization, and the quality of higher education is attracting more and more attention. Under the guidance of the orientation of the cultivation of applied talents, private undergraduate universities should adhere to the fundamental task of establishing morality and cultivating human beings. While cultivating applied and skilled talents, they should conscientiously assume the function of cultivating talents and cultivating all-people. It is worth pondering to avoid turning into a factory where professionals are trained. The effective way to solve this problem is to carry out high-quality general education with reference to the experience of general education reform and development of American universities and domestic research universities, combined with the ideas of private undergraduate universities themselves and the orientation of talent training.

Since the expansion of university enrollment in 1999, the scale of higher education has expanded rapidly. According to the National Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Education in 2018 issued by the Ministry of Education, in 2018, there were 2663 general colleges and universities in the country, of which 749 were private colleges; Among them, 6.496 million were private students, accounting for 22.95 percent of the country, and the gross enrolment rate in higher education reached 48.1 percent. China's higher education is in the stage of popularization, and is about to enter the stage of universalization. The quality of education, especially the quality of private higher education, attracts more and more attention.

Private undergraduate universities are generally positioned as applied universities to train applied talents adapted to economic and social development. Under the guidance of this orientation, it is easy for private undergraduate universities to emphasize too much on professional teaching and ignore the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities such as humanistic accomplishment and scientific accomplishment. Therefore, it is of special significance to construct a general education model in line with the reality of private undergraduate universities, and to strengthen students' personality education and all-person education in addition to professional learning.

An Overview of General Education

At the beginning of the 19th century, Professor A. S. Parkard, professor of Bowman College, first contacted the education of general education with university education. Since then, more and more people are keen to study and discuss it. In 1945, the Harvard Council of professors published "General Education in a Free Society" (Harvard Red Book), pointing out that general education is not knowledge education in the general sense, and that general education has a special mission. It requires shaping students as responsible adults and citizens, while at the same time cultivating students' perfect personality and ways to understand themselves and the world. [1] the Harvard Redbook argues that The goal of general education is to cultivate four abilities of students: the ability of effective thinking, the ability of communication, the ability of judgment, and the ability of cognition of value [2]. Harry Lewis, former Harvard dean, believes that general education is designed to Take advantage of college students' plasticity to encourage young people to know themselves and find their way to life. The task of general education is to remind students that they
should make use of their own knowledge to benefit human beings and not only pursue their own economic prosperity [3]. Professor Ganyang, who is devoted to promoting general education in China, has pointed out that the purpose of western general education is to defend the "identity of western civilization", while the central task of general education in Chinese universities is to strengthen the identity of Chinese youth to the Chinese civilization.

**The Model of General Education in American Universities**

General education originated in the United States, with Columbia, Chicago, Harvard, Stanford and other world-renowned schools most successful. There are many forms of general education in American universities, but the most common form is to offer core courses, which require undergraduate students to take compulsory or restricted courses. Generally speaking, American universities require undergraduate students to complete their core courses within the first two years of their admission to college, and begin to study major courses in the third year. [4] the "core courses" of American universities are strictly designed and strictly required. First-class academic training for students by first-class scholars in schools to enable students to have real academic literacy, especially reading the ability to read and understand classics, and these courses are the essence of famous schools.

American Liberal Arts College is a distinctive type of higher education in the United States, representing a classic, small-scale, high-quality undergraduate education. High-quality general education is the most important talent training characteristics of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences takes the concept of liberal arts and science as its aim. The school runs on a small scale. The number of students in the college is generally under 2000. The system of accommodation is carried out and the teaching in small classes is adopted, and the exchanges between teachers and students are frequent. Teachers' work is centered on teaching, and teaching is the main standard for teachers' assessment in liberal arts and science colleges. Liberal Arts Colleges mainly carry out undergraduate education, only a few provide a small number of postgraduate education. Liberal Arts Colleges have played an important role in the cultivation of high-quality talents by virtue of its high-quality undergraduate education.[5] At the American Liberal Arts College, all the core courses are designed as three major systems, including humanities, social science and natural science, in which junior students choose freely, and seniors who specialize in them. Teachers and students can also design their own courses, design credits.

**The Present Situation of General Education in Colleges and Universities in China**

As early as the first half of the 20th century, Yuanpei Cai and Yiqi Mei introduced general education into China. During the Republic of China, Chinese universities also followed the example of the United States by implementing "generalist education." in 1952, the central government carried out large-scale adjustments to colleges and universities throughout the country in accordance with the former Soviet Union's model of "professional education". In 1998, the Ministry of Education began to promote "cultural quality education" in colleges and universities throughout the country, and general education began to return to universities in China.

**Practice of General Education Reform in Research-oriented Universities**

In recent years, some domestic research universities have carried on beneficial exploration to general education. At present, there are two basic forms of general education in research universities: one is all the students, all majors carry out general education in the lower grade, and the other is professional education in the senior grade, such as Nanjing University; Another is part of the students, part of the four-year consistent system, such as Peking University Yuanpei College, Sun Yat-sen University Boya School, Fudan University Fudan College. These universities usually take the form of large class and small class discussion, invite excellent teachers to teach, create a high-level general education curriculum platform, design core curriculum modules. Adopted by Sun Yat-sen University "double-coded curriculum", which opens some basic courses of high-quality majors to undergraduate
students of foreign majors, is of great significance for ensuring the continuity and benign development of general education as a "common core curriculum". In addition, Sun Yat-sen University requires all doctoral students to serve as teaching assistants in general education courses, which ensures the implementation of the small class discussion system and the quality of the courses. In 2015, Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University and Sun Yat-sen University jointly established the "University Alliance for General Education." in 2016, six schools, including Zhejiang University, joined the alliance. In 2017, 34 universities joined the alliance. General education has been greatly developed in China and even in Chinese-speaking areas.

**Attempts at the Reform of General Education in Private Undergraduate Colleges**

Compared with the radical reform of general education in research universities, the practice of general education in private colleges is mostly reflected in the infiltration of curriculum and school-running ideas. The general education of South China Business College of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies is guided by the goal of talent training, which is "basic, specialized, strong in foreign language and heavy in practice". In addition to carrying out the general education according to the module, the college also pays attention to strengthening the general education in the practical links, carrying out the activities of "learning, speaking and using foreign languages at any time and anywhere" to highlight the characteristics of the school's foreign languages. Open a lecture on general education-"MBA Lecture Series", requiring senior students and all grade students of the School of Management to attend. In 2018, the college began to pilot large-scale enrollment in some secondary colleges, that is, in the first two years, regardless of major, focusing on general education, the next two years to carry out professional diversion. In 2016, City College of Southwest University of Science and Technology established the Institute of General Education, which aims to promote general education. It includes cultural classics and cultural heritage, philosophical wisdom and critical thinking, civilized dialogue and world vision. Scientific and technological progress and scientific spirit, ecological environment and life care, artistic creation and aesthetic experience six dimensions, core curriculum and elective curriculum design, strengthen students in the integration of knowledge, scientific understanding, cultural heritage, The communication between China and the West and the cultivation of knowledge and skills in five aspects. China Women's University has set up a series of courses of general education with distinct characteristics. Its general education curriculum module includes common basic courses, liberal arts courses and optional courses. Introduction to Feminine Learning and etiquette and self-cultivation are public basic courses with characteristics and compulsory courses for each major in the college. In the Boya curriculum module, including women's development and gender equality module courses. In the free elective module, more than 10 courses on gender have also been offered. [6] Jishou University Zhangjiajie College aims at cultivating applied high-level professionals with "broad general literacy, solid professional foundation and skilled vocational skills," and its general education starts from the initial stage of replicating the model of parent school. In the later stage of independent innovation, the Ministry of General Education was set up, which changed the elective course of general education into the course of talent development, suspended the courses of theoretical quality, and set up courses of operation and art.

**Problems Existing in General Education in Private Undergraduate Colleges**

Although private colleges have accumulated a certain amount of experience and formed some characteristics in the process of carrying out general education, there are still many problems.

**The Target Orientation of Talent Training Is Not Clear**

Under the influence of the model of "professional education" for decades, the cultivation of talents in private colleges emphasizes too much on professional education and neglects the cultivation of personality. In addition, private undergraduate colleges, due to the needs of social and economic development, mainly train applied talents, easy to fall into a pragmatic tendency, resulting in a strong practical ability of the students, but the narrow knowledge, lack of future development.
Understanding of General Education Is Not in Place

Nowadays, the managers of many private colleges have grown up in the mode of "professional education". Because of the limitation of their own knowledge structure, they lack the idea of general education, or lack of understanding of general education. This cognitive defect restricts the implementation of the concept of general education.

Teachers Are on the Low Side

Because the general education curriculum is easily marginalized, the teachers of the general education course are usually young teachers with the same level of teaching. In addition, after the country devolved the power of evaluation of professional titles to colleges and universities in recent two years, the teachers of private undergraduate colleges engaged in scientific research, the enthusiasm of evaluating titles was high, to a certain extent, it occupied the teaching time, resulting in the teachers unable to concentrate on teaching, and the teaching quality is difficult to improve.

The Quality of the Course Is Difficult to Guarantee

It is difficult to open high-quality general education courses because of short time and weak teaching staff in private undergraduate colleges. In addition, in many private undergraduate colleges, due to the small number of general education courses, in order to open a sufficient number of general education courses, often reduce the threshold of access to the curriculum, check-up is not strict.

The Students' Enthusiasm for Learning Is Not High

The students' theoretical literacy is relatively weak in private undergraduate colleges. They often regard the general education course as a tool to make up enough credits and do not study seriously in class. In addition, most of the extracurricular activities in the school are scheduled for seven or eight classes or evenings every day, which is in conflict with the time of the general education course, and the phenomenon of students skipping classes to participate in the activities is serious.

How to Implement General Education in Private Undergraduate Colleges

Private undergraduate colleges should carry out the general education of standard, characteristic and quality according to their own orientation of running a school and the goal of talent training.

Clarifying the Orientation of Talent Training Objectives

Private undergraduate colleges do not train research-type talents, nor do they train pure technical talents. The talents trained by private colleges should have correct values, strong professional knowledge and practical ability, a relatively scientific and complete knowledge structure, a certain degree of critical thinking, innovative consciousness, and an international vision. The realization of this talent training goal needs to work together through professional education and general education.

Setting up a Correct Concept of General Education

We should realize that general education is a perfect education, and it is of great significance to students' lifelong development. While mastering professional skills, students should learn to think independently, analyze and judge, express clearly, cooperate and communicate, and take responsibility. It is necessary to combine the idea of general education with the idea of running a university and the orientation of talent training, so as to make it run through the whole process and link of undergraduate education, and make it internalize into a kind of self-quality of the students.

Strengthening the Faculty of General Education

The general knowledge course takes on the important task of teaching people, integrating the ancient and modern, personality education and so on. It has higher requirements on the teachers' knowledge structure, academic attainments, humanities accomplishment and teaching methods, so it
is necessary to encourage professors and famous teachers to set up general education courses. In view of the fact that there are many young teachers and more teachers with overseas background in private colleges, we can strengthen the tutoring of young teachers and guide them to improve their teaching methods. Professors from foreign high-quality universities can also be invited to give lectures to each foreign teacher with a Chinese assistant. At the same time, foreign teachers can be invited to carry out teaching training to improve the teaching quality of teachers.

**Optimizing the Curriculum of General Education**

According to the characteristics of private undergraduate students to set up a reasonable course of general education. The students in private colleges have weak theoretical knowledge, so they should avoid setting up general courses with strong theory and pay more attention to applying writing, expressing communication, social psychology, traditional culture, world civilization and exploring the course of thinking. To strengthen the connection between the general education curriculum and the professional curriculum, we can draw lessons from the pattern of Sun Yat-sen University and carry out the "double coding course", which not only ensures the quality of the general education curriculum, but also has the sustainability.

**Setting up an "Activity Learning" Model**

Harvard University's fifth general education reform program in 2007 proposed that efforts should be made to create an atmosphere of practical teaching and establish a learning model based on practical activities, that is, "activity learning" [7]. So that students in extracurricular activities in-depth thinking about classroom theoretical knowledge, and extracurricular life practice to stimulate each other, connect and integrate. Private colleges have a strong practical ability, keen on community activities, extracurricular activities. We can make full use of the characteristics of students, effectively design extracurricular practical activities, and integrate them into the general education system.

**References**


