

Practical Approaches to Upholding Core Principles and Embracing Innovation in Ideological and Political Work for University Students in the New Era

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Abstract

Student ideological and political work constitutes the lifeline for higher education institutions to fulfill their fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education. In the new era, university students exhibit active ideological perspectives, diverse demands, and pronounced digital lifestyles; consequently, traditional didactic approaches to ideological and political work face challenges regarding their appeal, relevance, and practical effectiveness. Grounded in the requirements for constructing a systematic framework for ideological and political work in higher education institutions in the new era, this paper first reviews the evolving circumstances and emerging demands. It then analyzes current shortcomings in student ideological and political work—such as inadequate inter-agency coordination, limited diversity of implementation channels, and fragile online presence. Furthermore, the paper proposes practical strategies, including strengthening theoretical guidance, refining collaborative education mechanisms, advancing innovative approaches to online ideological and political work, and optimizing evaluation and assessment systems. These efforts aim to provide a reference for elevating the scientific rigor of student ideological and political work.

Keywords

Ideological and political work for students; "Three-Whole" Education Approach; fostering virtue through education; practical innovation.

1. Introduction

Ideological and political work serves as the lifeline of all endeavors in higher education institutions; it is crucial for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talents, ensuring the healthy growth of the younger generation, and directly addressing the overarching challenge of cultivating builders and successors of socialism. At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education Institutions, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that such work pertains to the fundamental questions of what kind of people higher education institutions should cultivate, how to cultivate such people, and for whom to cultivate them. He stressed the need to consistently prioritize fostering virtue and nurturing talents as the central focus, and to integrate ideological and political work throughout the entire process of teaching and learning [1]. In the new era, amid profound global transformations unseen in a century and the strategic imperative of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the growth environment, ideological landscape, and behavioral patterns of young students have undergone profound changes. On one hand, the adjustments in interests and the diversification of value systems driven by deep societal transformations have led to fluctuations in the ideological understanding of some students; on the other hand, the rapid advancement of information technologies—particularly the internet—has profoundly altered how young students access information, interact with others, and think. Against this backdrop,

how to adapt to these new circumstances and requirements, advance student ideological and political work by upholding core principles while embracing innovation, thereby enhancing its quality and efficiency, and overcoming the dilemma that "it is deemed important in theory but relegated to a secondary role in practice," has become a critical contemporary challenge that higher education institutions must address. This paper aims to, on the basis of elucidating these new circumstances and requirements, analyze the primary issues currently facing student ideological and political work, and subsequently propose practical pathways for innovative development.

2. New Situations and Requirements for Ideological and Political Work Among University Students in the New Era

The new challenges facing ideological and political work among university students in the new era are primarily manifested as the combined effects of dual transformations in both the external environment and the target demographic of education. From the perspective of the external environment, the struggle in the ideological domain remains complex and intense; internet and information technologies have profoundly reshaped the landscape of information dissemination; diverse social ideologies are infiltrating and spreading across campuses via new media platforms; and the trend toward diversified value systems has become increasingly pronounced. Consequently, universities have emerged as pivotal arenas for the convergence of ideologies and cultures, as well as for ideological confrontations. Regarding the target demographic, contemporary university students are predominantly "digital natives" — individuals characterized by agile thinking, distinct personalities, and a strong sense of agency. They are accustomed to acquiring information and expressing their concerns through online channels, and thus tend to resist one-dimensional, didactic educational approaches. As a result, traditional indoctrination-based education is increasingly struggling to yield tangible outcomes [4].

In response to these changes, the Communist Party of China and the State have set higher requirements for ideological and political work among students. Xi Jinping has pointed out that ideological and political theory courses are pivotal courses for fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education; it is essential to effectively leverage classroom teaching as the primary channel, promote reform and innovation in these courses, and continuously enhance their ideological depth, theoretical rigor, approachability, and relevance [1]. The "Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Political Work in Higher Education Institutions under New Circumstances," jointly issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, explicitly call for establishing a comprehensive educational framework involving all personnel, across all stages, and in all dimensions; it further mandates that ideological and political work be integrated throughout the entire educational and teaching process, thereby achieving holistic and multi-dimensional educational outcomes [2]. In 2020, eight departments, including the Ministry of Education, jointly issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of an Ideological and Political Work System in Higher Education Institutions," which outlined systematic measures covering theoretical arming, disciplinary teaching, daily education, management services, and safety and stability. These opinions call for the rapid establishment of a higher education ideological and political work system characterized by clear objectives, comprehensive content, well-defined standards, scientific operation mechanisms, and robust support mechanisms, thereby providing fundamental guidance for the systematic and institutionalized advancement of ideological and political work in higher education institutions in the new era[3]. These initiatives demonstrate that student ideological and political work is evolving from "isolated

breakthroughs" to "systematic integration," from "experience-driven approaches" to "science-driven approaches," and from "fragmented efforts" to "coordinated and synergistic initiatives."

3. Key Challenges Currently Facing Ideological and Political Work for Students

1. Insufficient collaboration among stakeholders in student development. Ideological and political work encompasses numerous aspects, including classroom teaching, daily management, campus culture, mental health support, and career guidance; however, in practice, instructors of ideological and political courses, student counselors, specialized course teachers, and administrative staff often operate in isolation—a phenomenon known as "isolated operations" —with inadequate effective linkage and coordination among these various components. Consequently, a synergistic approach to student development has not yet been fully established, and the vision of comprehensive, full-process, and all-dimensional student development requires further implementation[3][5]. Some specialized course teachers hold the misconception that "ideological and political work pertains solely to ideological and political courses and student counselors," leading to insufficient integration of curriculum-based ideological and political education with dedicated ideological and political courses.

2. The approaches employed remain relatively limited. Some universities still predominantly rely on traditional methods—such as classroom lectures, distribution of official documents, and intensive study sessions—emphasizing theoretical indoctrination while neglecting practical experience. Consequently, the educational offerings fail to align closely with the cognitive characteristics and practical concerns of university students, lacking both accessibility and relevance, which makes it difficult to genuinely resonate with students[4]. The educational potential of practical teaching, extracurricular activities, social practice, and volunteer services has not been fully leveraged; the disconnect between theoretical instruction and practical activities persists, resulting in limited student engagement and a weak sense of tangible benefit among students.

3. Inadequate development of online platforms. University students primarily engage in activities within cyberspace, where the internet has become an essential arena for their academic and personal lives. However, some universities still fail to adequately prioritize or effectively leverage online ideological and political education; the online content they provide tends to be homogeneous and formulaic, lacking high-quality works that resonate with students—works characterized by warmth and appeal. Furthermore, these platforms often exhibit insufficient interactivity, and their efforts to guide public opinion and foster positive values in cyberspace remain inadequate. Consequently, when faced with sudden public opinion incidents, these institutions frequently respond reactively.

4. the evaluation and assessment mechanisms remain inadequate. The monitoring of students' ideological trends predominantly relies on experiential judgment, lacking standardized and scientific assessment frameworks, which hinders timely early warning and targeted interventions; the effectiveness of ideological and political education efforts is difficult to quantify, as evaluation metrics tend to emphasize procedural documentation rather than actual educational outcomes, thereby limiting their motivational and corrective functions; furthermore, supporting mechanisms—such as team development and funding allocation—remain insufficiently robust[5]. A nationwide annual survey conducted by Shen Zhuanghai et al. also indicates that there remains considerable room for improvement in the methods, relevance, and effectiveness of ideological and political education for college students, and that students' sense of fulfillment requires further enhancement[6].

4. Practical Pathways for the Innovative Development of Ideological and Political Work among Students

To address the aforementioned issues and promote the advancement of ideological and political work among students—ensuring both adherence to core principles and innovative approaches—it is essential to integrate a problem-oriented approach with a goal-oriented approach, focusing efforts on the following key areas.

1. Strengthen theoretical grounding and leverage the classroom as the primary channel. Adhere to using Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era to shape character and nurture talent, deepen the reform and innovation of ideological and political education courses, and ensure that the Party's innovative theories are incorporated into teaching materials, classrooms, and students' minds. Focus on improving teaching methods by adeptly employing language that students can understand and are willing to engage with, thereby explaining theoretical concepts in a profound, thorough, and engaging manner. This approach enhances the ideological depth, theoretical rigor, approachability, and relevance of ideological and political education courses. Simultaneously, organically integrate ideological and political education with professional education, thoroughly identify ideological and political elements across various courses, and foster alignment between course-based ideological and political education and dedicated ideological and political courses, so as to achieve resonance between value guidance and knowledge transmission [1][3].

2. Refine collaborative mechanisms to establish a holistic educational community. Adhering to a student-centered approach, we will coordinate various educational components—including classroom teaching, daily student management, campus culture, social practice, mental health support, and career services—thereby bridging the "first classroom" and the "second classroom." This will foster a powerful synergy characterized by whole-staff involvement, end-to-end coverage, and all-dimensional educational support. We will implement a collaborative education framework involving class advisors, mentors, and counselors, while strengthening the home-school-community linkage mechanism. These efforts will ensure seamless integration of educational resources across organizational, institutional, and resource dimensions, preventing fragmented efforts[3][5]. Furthermore, we will emphasize cultivating character and nurturing students through cultural engagement, fostering a positive campus cultural environment that allows students to acquire essential values and skills through subtle and ongoing influence.

3. Promote innovation in online ideological and political education to secure strategic positions in cyberspace. In line with the trends toward digitalization and intelligentization, proactively leverage platforms such as short videos, social media platforms, and campus new media to create online ideological and political content that features clear themes, is vivid and engaging, and resonates with students; furthermore, implement interactive and immersive educational initiatives. Enhance online research into students' ideological dynamics and big data analysis to promptly address students' concerns, effectively guide online public opinion, and ensure that cyberspace becomes the greatest source of growth for ideological and political work rather than a vacuum zone [4]. Simultaneously, strengthen online literacy education to guide students in maintaining clarity of mind and discerning right from wrong within a complex and diverse information environment.

4. Refine the assessment and evaluation mechanisms to enhance scientific rigor. Establish a regularized mechanism for monitoring students' ideological trends, employing a combination of questionnaire surveys, one-on-one dialogues, and big data analysis to accurately gauge students' ideological dynamics, thereby enabling the provision of targeted educational services and the implementation of personalized strategies. Improve the evaluation criteria for ideological and political work by treating the effectiveness of student cultivation as a key

benchmark, scientifically designing evaluation indicators, and refining incentive and constraint mechanisms, thereby facilitating the transition of ideological and political work from an "extensive" approach to a "refined" one[5][6]. Strengthen the development of the counselor workforce, enhancing their professional competencies and expertise, to provide robust support for the high-quality development of ideological and political work.

5. Conclusion

Adhering to fundamental principles while innovating in ideological and political work for university students in the new era constitutes both a systematic undertaking and a long-term mission. "Adhering to fundamental principles" entails consistently upholding the socialist orientation in running educational institutions and remaining true to the original aspiration and mission of cultivating talents for the Party and the nation; "innovating" entails keeping pace with the demands of the times, staying closely aligned with the actual circumstances of students, continuously refining work methods, and optimizing institutional mechanisms. Only by employing systemic thinking to construct an effective work framework, and by adopting a student-centered approach to enhance the accessibility and efficacy of education, can we steadily strengthen the contemporary relevance and appeal of ideological and political work among students. This approach will guide young people to fortify their ideals and convictions, embrace the responsibilities of our era, and contribute their youthful vigor to the journey toward realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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