

Exploring Practical Pathways for Cultivating Student Cadres in Higher Education: Constructing a “1+4+3 Model” from the Perspective of Counselor Work

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Abstract:

Under the modernization of higher education governance, student cadres, as the core carriers of “Three-Self Education” (self-management, self-education, and self-service), play a pivotal role in achieving moral education and talent cultivation. This study employs a grounded theory research method to systematically deconstruct the practical challenges faced by “Post-00s” student cadres in dimensions such as subjective agency awakening, political literacy cultivation, organizational norm construction, and professional competency development. From the dual identity of counselors as “practitioners-researchers,” the study innovatively proposes a “1+4+3” cultivation model. Practice demonstrates that this model, through its closed-loop mechanism of value guidance, four-dimensional empowerment, and outcome evaluation, significantly enhances the service efficacy, organizational efficiency, and developmental effectiveness of student cadres. It provides a replicable, practical paradigm for cultivating student cadres in the new era. The standardized meeting procedures and document management systems developed in this research offer referential frameworks for ideological and political education in higher education.

Keywords:

Student cadre cultivation
Counselor work
Competency enhancement
1+4+3 model
Practical pathways

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1. Introduction

Student cadres, as the backbone of student self-governance, hold significant importance in university operations. Cultivating student cadres is a systematic project influenced by multiple factors, with comprehensive competency enhancement being the key focus ^[1,2].

2. Problem analysis: Realistic challenges in contemporary student cadre cultivation

Under the dual influence of digital transformation and Generation Z characteristics, participatory observation and in-depth interviews reveal four tensions in current

student cadre cultivation:

- (1) Diminished subjectivity: 57.3% of surveyed cadres exhibit a “passive-responsive“ work style, relying solely on explicit instructions from faculty.
- (2) Theoretical deficiency: Some student cadres neglect Marxist theory study, show limited engagement with national policies, and lack policy interpretation skills, leading to ambiguous work direction.
- (3) Normative disorder: Issues like hierarchical overreach, inverted procedures (e.g., unauthorized budget alterations) and operational irregularities are observed in activities.
- (4) Professional shortcomings: Skills are fragmented, with gaps in official document writing, formatting, etiquette, and event planning, reflecting a structural lack of professional competence that risks reducing cadres to mere “tools.“

Beneath these surface challenges lies a deeper crisis of role identity among student cadres and systemic flaws in training frameworks, demanding comprehensive solutions.

3. Practical innovation: The “1+4+3 model“ from a counselor’s perspective

Addressing these issues, the study propose a “1+4+3 Model“ in our practical work—a comprehensive training framework that forms an educational closed loop of value guidance, capacity building, and outcome evaluation. “1 Core“: Anchored in ideological and value-based mentorship by academic advisors. “4 Competencies“: Focused on cultivating student dynamism, theoretical grounding, operational efficiency, and professional skills. “3 Outcomes“: Committed to achieving greater motivation, smoother workflows, and accelerated growth among student cadres. This structured approach has proven highly effective in building a high-caliber student leadership team.

3.1. Value anchoring: A dual demonstration and leadership system

By systematically reflecting on our experiences as

both a student cadre and an academic advisor, while continuously studying higher education theories and updating knowledge, I established a “Mentor Demonstration Field“ and a “Peer Mentorship Chain.“

- (1) Mentor demonstration: Student affairs professionals must first define what kind of student cadres to cultivate and how to cultivate them effectively. Guided by President Xi Jinping’s principle of “setting an example in words and deeds,“ This embodies the philosophy: “To mold students into certain kinds of leaders, the study must first become such leaders ourselves“^[3]. Through lectures, hands-on coaching, and role modeling, the study instill correct values and equip cadres with systematic methodologies^[4].
- (2) Peer mentorship: A “Golden Seed“ program selects exemplary cadres as mentors, fostering a “1+2+N“ mentorship chain (1 mentor guiding 2 departments, influencing N freshmen) fosters peer coaching, cross-grade collaboration, and multi-tiered demonstration. This creates a virtuous cycle of cadre development and an ecological matrix for competency transfer.

3.2. Capacity building: A four-in-one empowerment

3.2.1. Agency activation: Implement a “Three-platform, Three-rights“ system (Decision-making, execution, supervision platforms; Proposal, planning, evaluation rights)

The three-platform include decision-making, execution and supervision platforms, while the three-rights include proposal, planning and evaluation rights. In campus activities, student cadres are placed at the forefront—granted visibility, honor, and public recognition—to enhance their motivation, initiative, and accountability. For example, nameplates are created for key cadres who serve as judges or guests during events like college speech competitions, increasing their exposure among peers. In routine operations, advisors intentionally step back, focusing on behind-the-scenes guidance and strategic oversight while ceding the central role to student cadres. Controlled delegation of authority is practiced to foster ownership. During

student union elections, advisors focus on steering the overall direction and vetting core positions. At the same time, department heads are selected through established procedures that prioritize cadres' input, effectively "returning the union to students."

3.2.2. Theoretical immersion: Establish a "Biweekly forum + Project-based learning" hybrid model

Ideology guides action, as unclear thinking leads to inadequate execution. In this sense, theoretical learning should take precedence over transactional and specific tasks^[5]. For student leadership teams, only by arming themselves with scientific theories and steadfastly following the Party's guidance can they fulfill their duties and serve fellow students effectively. A regular department meeting system has been established within the student union, where each department holds weekly meetings^[6,7]. These sessions integrate the study of Party theories and national policies with departmental work reviews and planning, fostering a "dual enhancement" of student leaders' theoretical literacy and practical capabilities.

3.2.3. Procedural standardization

Standardization serves as the prerequisite and guarantee for effective operations. The study have established 9 SOP processes covering activity approvals, document management, and other areas to enhance work efficiency^[8]. Building on this foundation, the study focus on institutional improvements to help students clarify relationships, delineate responsibilities, categorize tasks, and optimize workflows. To address irregular document storage practices in student organizations, all departments are required to set up public email accounts for daily operations and establish a "cloud-based document repository." This system centralizes material distribution channels while ensuring secure archival of historical records, facilitating document retrieval and workflow continuity^[9].

3.2.4. Vocational training: Build a "Writing-Etiquette-Interview" competency framework through workshops and peer coaching, empowering cadres as "skill ambassadors"

- (1) Writing skills enhancement: Invite instructors with extensive official document writing experience

to conduct specialized training for student unions, elevating cadres' writing proficiency and responsible for quality control of critical documents to upgrade publicity standards^[10].

- (2) Enhancement of etiquette competence: Organize etiquette seminars to impart protocol knowledge and refine behavioral standards. Guide students to refine every detail through repeated simulations and practical drills, establishing model meeting benchmarks.
- (3) Interviewing skills enhancement: Organize simulated interviews with diverse scenarios (e.g., crisis management, teamwork conflicts)^[11]. Rotate roles between interviewers and candidates to develop empathy and adaptability. Use case studies to sharpen problem-solving abilities. Encourage students to structure answers using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

Through this systematic approach, the study implements hands-on training to develop a cohort of highly skilled student cadres. These cultivated talents then serve as "training coaches" to disseminate acquired skills within their respective departments and classes, creating a sustainable knowledge transfer ecosystem.

4. Outcome evaluation: Multidimensional competency enhancement

Through practical implementation and follow-up surveys, significant improvements have been observed in students' work initiative, theoretical cognition, process standardization, and professional skills. This successful transformation has cultivated high-quality student cadres as "vanguard leaders," while student organizations and activities have achieved a leapfrog development from teacher-led operations to student self-management, particularly manifested in three key aspects:

4.1. Enhanced motivation among student cadres

The appeal of student leadership roles has significantly increased, with student cadres demonstrating heightened enthusiasm for peer service. Student union transitions have been successfully completed with high quality

^[12,13]. Cadres' sense of ownership has been strengthened, enabling proactive activity planning and effective implementation of key student union initiatives. Improved execution capabilities and initiative have led to structured activity management: pre-event planning, in-process consultation, and post-event summarization. Particularly notable is their ability to report key milestones to supervisors at crucial junctures, effectively preventing operational errors.

4.2. Optimized student union operations

Comprehensive implementation of institutional mechanisms (departmental meetings, public email systems) has enhanced operational standardization and significantly improved work efficiency. Event preparation time for college-scale activities has been reduced from previous delays to current three-day preparation cycles (excluding preliminary arrangements), earning widespread praise from faculty and students ^[14]. The student union has developed distinctive operational features and established its brand of student work excellence.

4.3. Accelerated personal growth of students

In conference etiquette, student cadres now independently manage logistics for large college events. Appropriate personal etiquette and exceptional writing skills have

become essential qualities for cadres. Professional development: Cadres demonstrate proficient theoretical understanding, writing competence, and interview skills that meet requirements for Teacher Qualification Certificates and teacher recruitment examinations, largely eliminating the need for external training and laying solid foundations for future employment ^[15].

5. Conclusion

This study breaks through the traditional experience-based training paradigm and constructs a "1+4+3" model. Theoretically, it establishes a structured framework for student leaders' competency development; practically, it produces transferable standardized toolkits; educationally, it achieves a paradigm shift from instrumental rationality to value rationality. Future research could expand into cross-institutional validation, longitudinal tracking studies, and explore practical pathways for big data technology to empower quality monitoring in training. As the modernization of higher education governance advances, how to deeply integrate student leadership development into the "San Quan Cultivation of Students" (whole-process, all-staff, and all-round education) framework remains a critical area for ongoing academic exploration.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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